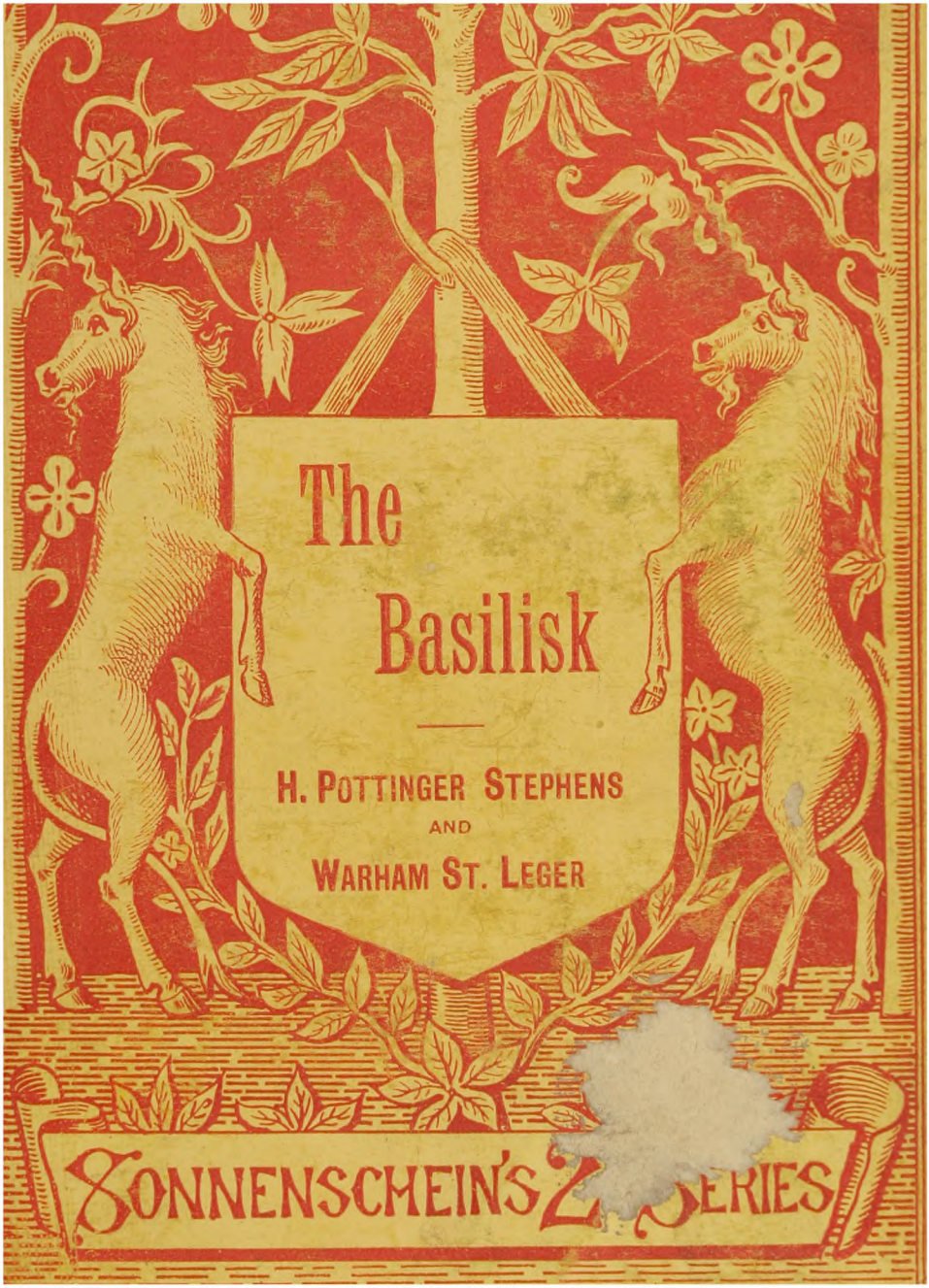
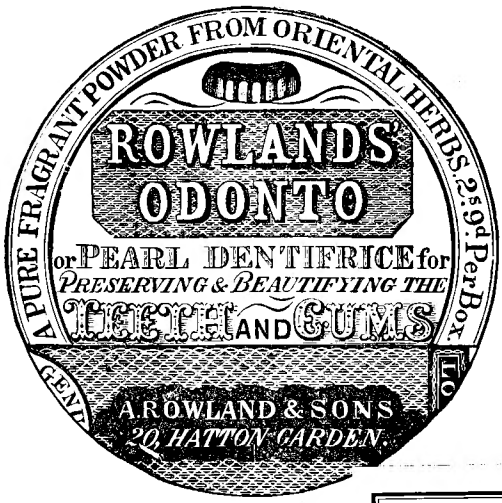

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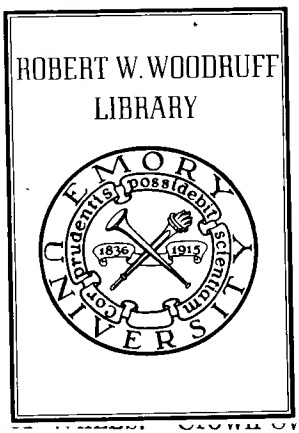
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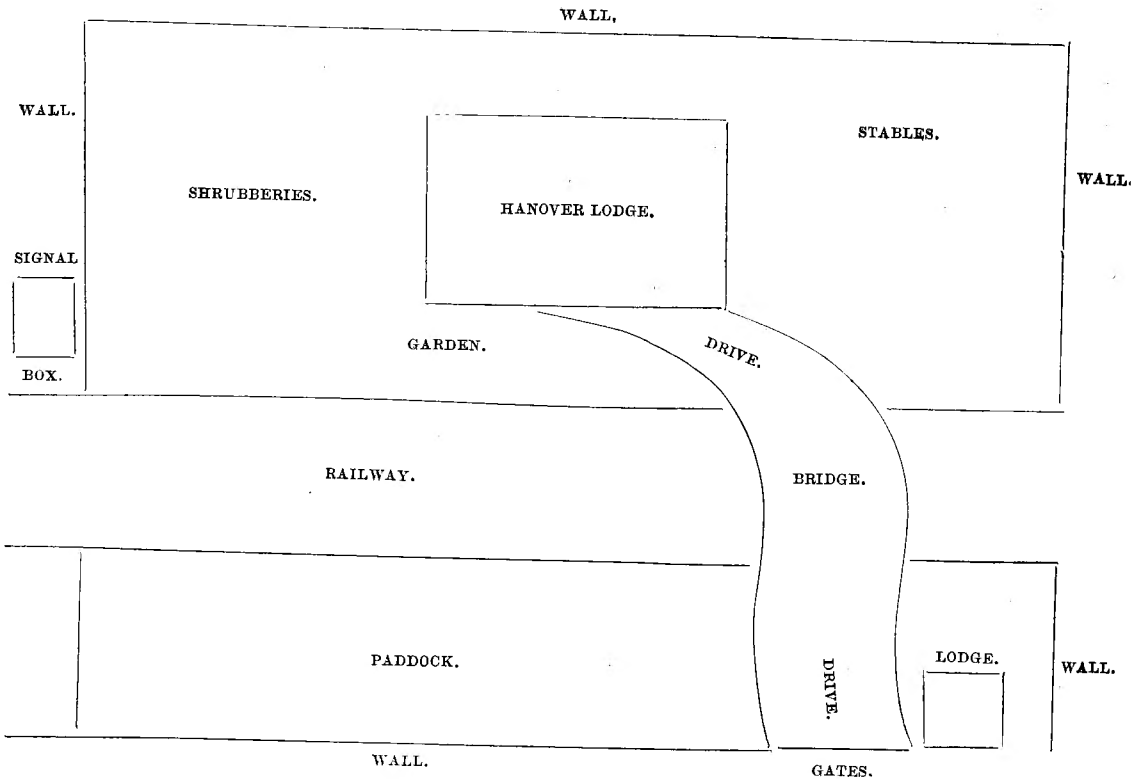
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PLAN OF HANOVER LODGE AND GROUNDS.

THE UNICORN SERIES.

THE BASILISK.

BY

H. POTTINGER STEPHENS

AND

WARHAM ST. LEGER.

Stereotyped 

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THE BASILISK.

A STORY OF TO-DAY.

CHAPTER I.

RETROSPECTIVE.

ST. BARTIMEUS'S Home for the Blind, in Quex-road, Kilburn, is one of those numerous institutions, half scientific, half charitable, and wholly admirable, which do so much to justify the nineteenth century in its tenure of such an advanced place among the ages. Founded by private benevolence, the Home gives what its name professes to a limited number of patients of the better class, whose means do not allow of their enjoying the highest skill, except under conditions of painful publicity, and who, but for the shelter afforded by the Home, would have been brought, perhaps, to beggary by their affliction. Of

this refuge was I, Frank Coplestone, an inmate; and one fine afternoon in September, 1883, I was sitting in the resident surgeon's sanctum, as had for some time past been rather an established custom, smoking a long pipe, and talking, much like other people, over the concerns of our little world with good Dr. Shaw.

In the pauses of our intimate and desultory conversation, I reflected for the hundredth time on the marvellous and merciful faculty men possess of becoming, if not reconciled, at least resigned, to the most dreadful conditions of existence. Reconciled I was not. But had I looked into a magician's mirror four years ago, and seen myself in the future the blind helpless being I now was, I should have deemed it a lying vision to have shown me capable of living at all under such an affliction. Four years ago! What an immense time for a young man to look forward to! What an unlimited field for hopes and ambitions! What an insignificant period to look back upon, when the years have hidden their chances, or quickly run the gauntlet of slumbering ambition. The last four years had been to me a dream of horror, from which I was only just awakening into a sober darkness. And yet I could sit smoking with Dr. Shaw, and talk with everyday interest over things in general. I could not have done it had I really shared Shaw's opinion of my case. I knew he had come to consider it hopeless. The principle that made me a toler-

able companion, the principle that kept me a living or a sane man, was Hope.

The life at St. Bartimeus's, if not of an exhilarating character, was made as cheerful as circumstances allowed. We were not, even the most forlorn of us, left without the sense of sympathy and even friendliness. We had a goodly number of visitors who interested themselves in our interests, and joined, both actively and passively, in our entertainments. Some were of the nature of real friends; others were those good souls, who feel that affliction gives a brother a sort of claim upon them, and generally contrive to let him realise that he is a sort of poor relation of the human family, whose rights cannot be gainsaid, but whose situation allows of a certain goody-goody discount upon their benevolence. Our concerts were, in a limited sense, celebrated, if I may with propriety say so, as I was the chief musician of the establishment. Plays, in which some of us took part, with the extraordinary facility which seems incredible, or at least miraculous, to those who have not had much experience of the blind, were not seldom performed in the large hall of the Home. These plays afforded at least as much gratification to outsiders as to the inmates. For the hall allowed of the erection of a good-sized stage, and accommodated a large audience. This being the case, benevolence and dramatic ambition went hand-in-hand; and many amateurs who cared little for

amusing the blind, were glad to exercise their talent upon so favourable an arena, before their kinsfolk and acquaintance. Dr. Shaw, though not much of an actor, being, in fact, as he said, bothered by having a lot of other people about him, was much given to recitations on these festive occasions, and being something of a poet, often took the opportunity of letting off his own compositions, which were generally of a martial character. As I was always content to sit silently, and let my thoughts run on as they would, while the good doctor declaimed his compositions, he had come to regard me as a critic of no mean order, and a useful court of first instance.

To-day, with an apologetic authority of tone, which I had learned to interpret as the precursor of a preliminary reading, Dr. Shaw, our conversation having turned on the next projected entertainment, proposed to read me a dramatic poem he had been writing for the occasion. I settled myself to think. He took a turn or two about the room, and then accompanied my thoughts with the not unmusical cadences of his partially trained voice.

And as he read I let my mind go back to the past, I saw myself again a boy of nineteen, imaginative, impulsive, romantic. My mother, an officer's widow of scanty means, had managed to send me to a good school, and was now contriving to let me study music in London. I had a taste, amounting to a passion, for music, and I worked at it with

a will ; being resolved not only to make a living by it, but some time or other, to make a name and fame as well. How hard I worked! At school I had done but moderately well. I had no heart in the work there ; and though, as I have said, a romantic and imaginative boy, I was a tolerably robust one, and devoted myself to games with a zeal which might have done no little if devoted to classics or mathematics. The change from the free open-air school-life to that of close study and mental excitement in London, began to tell on me before I gave the matter a thought; and it was probably as much to my weak state of health, as to any extraordinary amount of youthful susceptibility, that I owed my first great passion—sudden, overwhelming, hopeless. I was looking over some music one afternoon in a shop in Bond Street, when two ladies entered; one I did not notice—she was like all other women to my unawakened eyes. The other came as a revelation. The first sight of her face applied a match to all the stored-up romance of my mind. She was of a tall and stately figure, with plentiful dark hair, and wonderful black eyes. She looked at me casually, as I gazed at her; a look of the most expressionless character as though at a being of another sphere altogether. The incurious coldness of her look seemed to me to give emphasis to her beauty, to challenge the conquest of her imperturbability. The blood rushed to my head, and I mentally resolved to make that the quest

of my life. However young and foolish I was, I was not mad enough to bring myself prominently under their notice. I waited till they had left the shop, and then tried to ask with unconcern who they were. The shopman did not know. I had seen them turn up Bond Street, as they left the shop, not a minute before. I rushed out, horrified at the thought of losing sight of them. In vain; they had disappeared. After this, life was quite changed for me. My mind was filled with thoughts of this once-seen stranger; my eyes saw nothing but the face with the wonderful impassive eyes. It is difficult for those who have never experienced one of these wild passions, which are contemptuously lumped in a common category, as calf-loves, to realise the intensity and power with which they rage among the most commonplace surroundings. In most cases they only produce an exalted state of mind, which does not betray itself except, perhaps, to the most intimate of bosom friends. The victim of it goes his way in a fairyland or a hell of his own making. Occasionally only, in very highly-wrought natures, a tragedy of some sort happens—brain-fever and sometimes suicide. I went home with this new fascination upon me. My powers of studying were impaired. I struggled to stick to work. I grew restless and wakeful, and in my hours of relaxation took solitary walks, worrying myself by fancying I saw the face of my dreams in every carriage that passed. My walks

always took me eventually to Bond-street, and past the shop where I had seen my vision. The more I let this craze grow upon me, the more wretched and anxious I became. I haunted Bond-street, fearing that just when I gave up my vigil she might come once more to the music-shop. I grew pale, thin, utterly miserable. At length I was roundly taken to task by a friend or two. They attributed the change in my appearance simply to over-work. In truth, work had something to do with it; for though I profited but little by my application, I worried myself still more. "Take a holiday," was the advice of my friends; and at last I agreed. I planned to run down into the country to my mother; but at the last moment my courage failed me. I could not tear myself away from London, from the possibilities—the wearing possibilities of meeting the unknown beauty again. I wrote to excuse myself for a day or two, and then on the morning I had designed to begin my holiday, I set out for a long walk.

I walked for miles building castles, nourishing absurd hopes. I walked on far beyond my strength, and when about two miles from a station, where I meant to take train for London, I was caught in heavy rain. Tired and wet through, I journeyed back. I could not face the thought of a solitary evening in my lodgings. I walked up towards Piccadilly. Passing St. James's Hall I found a big concert announced for that evening. I went in. The light struck

with painful force upon my eyes, as I took a look round the vast and crowded hall. But as I resolved to withdraw them from the painful glare and give myself up wholly to the music, I caught sight of a face in a remote stall that made me giddy with sudden emotion. It was she. There was no thought of the music now. I stared, all eyes, in the direction of the mysterious beauty. I shivered with excitement or chill—I knew not which. Every now and then the intensity of my gaze was hindered by intense shoots of pain and rings of various colours floating before my eyes. I was unable to remain pent up in the room. I trembled at the thought that I might miss her at the door. I do not know exactly what my intention was. I remember only that I was madly anxious to see her close once more. I made my way out, and waited about the exit by which I knew she must come. It was cold and wet. I was fasting, weary, and wet through. Yet I waited with only the thought that she would sooner or later appear. At last people began to come out. First in driblets, then in a full stream, then in a crowd. My patience was rewarded. She appeared. In watching her I forgot my skill in maintaining my place. I was borne on in the crowd, and managed to stop myself just by the first step. There I clung and waited still. She came nearer. As she came quite close to me, I lost my foothold again, and was carried some steps into the street. She appeared on the step. At

that moment a sort of rush behind drove those, who were waiting, against the stream of people coming out of the doorway. I slipped and tumbled, and found myself falling against the woman who had for weeks been vainly in my thoughts by night and day. I could not quite save myself. She put up her arm instinctively to protect herself. I fell against her. A massive bracelet, which she wore, was probably driven into her arm. Reeling, dizzied, enraged, ashamed, I collected my senses for some sort of apology. But she turned upon me those splendid black eyes that had haunted my morbid fancy for weeks, and looked upon me with such an expression of anger and contempt—such haughty fury and withering disdain, that I felt as if I had received a physical blow. I reeled; dark circles seemed to grow and grow before me—the centre of which were those cruel dark eyes. I stretched out my hands, staggered, and lost consciousness.

It was the usual story. Weak health, fatigue, exposure, excitement brought on a dangerous illness; and, when I recovered my health, my sight was gone.

Since then my life had been a terrible struggle with despair. The first peace I had known had been in the calm and pleasant precincts of St. Bartimeus, whither I had come after feeling for three years an intolerable burden at home. The state of semi-madness that preceded my illness seemed now almost ludicrous to me, except for its

connection with my terrible calamity. The only feeling that remained in my mind about the unknown lady was one of almost superstitious repulsion. I felt that she was in some way responsible for my blindness, that her malignant glance had been the real cause of my loss of sight.

Over all these reflections my mind ran, while my good kind friend, Dr. Shaw, was submitting his new poem to my critical consideration.

"By-the-bye," said Shaw, when we had discussed his effort a little, "by-the-bye, the Beaufoys have come back. You will probably hear Miss Beaufoy sing."

I detected again the tone of dislike with which he always mentioned the name of the daughter of one of our principal supporters.

"What's wrong with Miss Beaufoy?" I asked, "You always speak as if you hate her."

He laughed.

"I don't hate her," he said. "Well, yes, I believe I do. I don't trust her. She looks malignant. I tell you what, she always makes me think of a Basilisk."

A Basilisk! That was the very name I had mentally given, ever since my illness, to the lady whose burning glance was the last thing I had seen before darkness settled upon me. I gave a violent start.

He laughed.

"Would you like to know her?"

"Yes," I answered.

"Very well. She will be here next Wednesday. I will introduce you to the Basilisk."

CHAPTER II.

AN INTRODUCTION.

"I WILL introduce you to the Basilisk."

This promise of Dr. Shaw's, insignificant as it sounded, produced a great effect upon me; an effect of which, while I owned its beneficial influence, I was in truth a little bit ashamed.

During all the time of my darkness I had kept up a passive rebellion against the calamity that had befallen me. I had abstained from open complainings, but this was more from pride than from submission; and while I felt most deeply the blight that had fallen on all my interests, I never thought of acquiring new ones, or of trying to find amusement or occupation in the little events of the daily life around me. Blindness was a calamity which I had no more regarded as likely to happen to me than death itself. And death, though generally recognised as inevitable, is about the very last thing a young man expects to meet with in his proper person. Moreover, I had always had a kind of contempt for blindness, associating it very intimately with some aggressive form of dissent, as an

alternative with desperate villainy. Charles Dickens was responsible for the latter idea, the character of Stagg having made a deep impression upon my boyish mind. The former notion was derived from the wife of a village shopkeeper, who, if not actually blind, was in the habit of wearing portentous blue spectacles. This good woman would check the high spirits of a schoolboy, home for the holidays, by launching at my heedless head apposite texts of Scripture of a comminatory character, and crushing any attempts at conversation which touched upon the weather, by intimating plainly the impiety of commenting upon the direct dealings of Providence.

When recovering from my illness at home I shrank from the kindness of friends and visitors. Their sympathy enraged instead of soothing me. How, indeed, could they sympathise? They were out in the light of the sun; I was down—far down in the abyss. It was nothing to me that I could hear their voices from above, hushed only when they spoke to me, to a tenderer tone. I was cut off from them; and they only aggravated my misery by a kindness which brought no comfort, a helpfulness which brightened not the edge of my despair. I shrank from all efforts to draw me out of myself, and would doubtless have moped myself to madness if concern at being a burden to my mother had not drawn me to accept the shelter of St. Bartimeus's Home. Here I had gradually been led to

mix in the musical pursuits which were so much in favour there; not that I took any interest in them, but that being among fellow-sufferers I had less longing to shrink from the insolent happiness that could only play at being touched by my misfortune.

The growth, then, of an ordinary interest in my mind was a new and wholesome sign—yet I was ashamed of its cause. The mere prospect of being introduced to a stranger, whom I could not even see, somehow made me feel that I still belonged to the general fellowship of mankind, in a way that no care or kindness had hitherto enabled me to realise.

I was very curious to make Miss Beaufoy's acquaintance, and Dr. Shaw's dislike of her did nothing to diminish my curiosity. The similarity of idea conveyed by the doctor's name for her, with that which was so impressed on my mind by the vision that remained with me all these years, led me to attach, I believe, a sort of superstitious importance to the meeting. I said very little of this kind to Dr. Shaw; but he knew very well that the prospect had made a difference in me already. For one thing, I bethought me of my personal appearance. I remembered, among other impressions of the past, one that blind people generally wore long coats and long hair. It was not easy to picture myself in such guise; but I realised that my hair was decidedly bunchy, and soon made an expedition under

the charge of a faithful attendant, from which I returned shorn according to the ordinary custom of mankind.

In the evening I went round to Dr. Shaw's room for a talk.

"Hallo!" he cried on seeing me. "Why, what have you been doing to yourself?"

"I've only had my hair cut properly," I said; "unless—I say, I hope he *has* cut it properly."

"Oh yes; it's all right. But why this sudden change of style?"

"Well, I don't see why one shouldn't look as much like other people as possible," I said. "I don't want to figure at the piano on Wednesday like a man who has cut his string, and escaped from his dog."

"Oh—ah!" said Shaw. "Wednesday evening! to be sure. I wish some of the others would take the same view. At the same time, Coplestone, it seems to me that you're unusually interested about Wednesday."

"It's the first time I have taken interest in anything for four years," I answered. "I don't know why."

"I think I do," said Shaw. "Something has excited your fancy—something I said about one of the guests."

"That's exactly what it is. Ever since you told me about Miss Beaufoy—the Basilisk—I have been looking forward to seeing her." The expressions of my previous

life clung to me. Indeed, we all habitually spoke of "seeing" people who visited us.

"Well, my dear fellow," said Shaw rather sourly, "if you're in that frame of mind, I think it's just as well that your view of her will be mental. I think she is a most dangerous-looking woman—the sort of woman who could compel a man to do anything she wished, and would finally drive him to desperation, without changing colour or quickening the beat of a pulse."

"I shall be safe enough, if that's all," said I, with a renewed feeling of dejection, for, though my desire to meet her was due to a curiosity which had little in common with admiration, I could not help feeling how hopelessly I was debarred by fate from the bitters, even, as well as the sweets of love.

"She is credited with having caused two or three tragedies," continued Shaw. "One I know of. It was some four or five years ago, when she used to go out a good deal. Her people—that is, her father and herself—never go anywhere now, I hear. A man I knew very well—he was engaged to a very nice girl—I knew her very well, too. He met Miss Beaufoy—again and again. She knew all about his engagement, and I maintain that she deliberately amused herself by making him turn traitor to his love, and, when he had irretrievably broken with the girl, she dropped him—cut him dead—looked at

him as if he were a being of a different creation altogether."

"How do you know?" I asked, partly for fun, as the good doctor had almost risen to his dramatic recitation pitch.

"I know well enough," he said more coolly, "because the young man was a great friend of my own. We quarrelled over the affair when it began to grow serious. But I watched the progress of it, and he came to me when it was all up, and we made friends again. And I'm very glad of it, for he shot himself the following day."

And the doctor spoke in a very matter-of-fact tone, which showed me that he was still keenly alive to his friend's loss, and by no means inclined to forgive the cause of it.

"And you meet her sometimes?" I asked.

"Oh yes; but they haven't been here for a long time now."

"Does she know that you know of this affair?"

"Not to my knowledge. It would make no difference if she did."

"What is Mr. Beaufoy?"

"Nobody knows. Something big in the City, I suppose. Some think he is a large money-lender, but he is only known to be extremely rich, and to be given to scientific pursuits."

"How do you know them here?" I asked.

"He is one of our greatest benefactors," said Shaw—"one of the original subscribers, and he occasionally takes patients from here and finds employment for them."

"In what capacity?"

"That I don't know. Presumably something good, as they have never communicated with us again."

All this greatly interested me, and even as Shaw was speaking a servant brought in some letters.

"Here," he went on, as the door closed behind the servant, "here is a letter from the lady herself. Ah, she proposes to come over to-morrow afternoon to arrange about the songs for the entertainment."

Next day I was in the music-room, playing by myself, when I heard the door open, and the voices of persons entering the room. I stopped playing, and rose, turning towards the voices, and thrilled with an intense and painful longing for the power to pierce the darkness which shrouded me.

"Let me introduce Mr. Coplestone," said the voice of Dr. Shaw. "Mr. Coplestone is our chief musician now, Miss Beaufoy.'

I bowed in my darkness, wondering what manner of woman it was who was before me.

"I don't know whether you will be able to accompany me," she said.

Her voice did not satisfy my curiosity much. She spoke

in a low and musical tone, but with, I thought, a touch of hardness and decision. I pictured her tall, and dark, and imperious, but oh, how I longed to see her!

"I can soon pick up the accompaniment," I said, "if I don't know them already. What do you wish to sing?"

She named two songs, one of which I was familiar with; the other was new to me.

"Play it over to Mr. Coplestone, Mary," she said, and I then discovered that there was another lady present. She introduced me in a very off-hand way, as I made room on the music-stool, to "Miss Fortescue, my cousin."

The song tried through once or twice, I found no difficulty in getting through it. It was simple enough, and at no time would it have presented any difficulty; but the deprivation had quickened my other faculties, as it often does, and a thing, even once heard, seemed present to my ear, if I chose, almost as plainly as if it were actually sounding.

Miss Fortescue's touch, was that of a timid and inexperienced player. She seemed, as far as I could judge, to be shy, either of me or her cousin, for she said scarcely a word, and received in silence little directions about the music, and so forth, which were given in a tone such as an imperious mother uses towards a disciplined child.

Shaw soon left us. Miss Beaufoy sang very well indeed, and I soon became quite interested in the music. We had

a large stock of songs in the room, and became engaged in a musical conversation, which led to my playing innumerable accompaniments, at which Miss Beaufoy was pleased to express her wonderment and her admiration. Her voice acquired considerable softness, I noticed, when she chose. And it was in a singular winning tone that she asked me whether, with such musical abilities and taste, I did not find life terribly dull at St. Bartimeus's.

"I do," I answered; "I did. It is different this afternoon. It makes so much difference when there is any appreciation."

"I think you play wonderfully," she answered in a matter-of-fact tone.

"Does Miss Fortescue sing?" I asked, feeling somewhat confused by her straightforward commendation.

"No," said a timid voice; "that is, I like it, but I have had no practice."

"No; she does not," said her cousin bluntly.

There was a pause. Then she added:

"Should you care to leave St. Bartimeus's, Mr. Coplestone?"

"Where should I go?" I answered with some asperity.

"You know my father takes a great interest in the welfare of the—of the blind."

"I have heard so."

"There are many ways in which you could be useful to

my father if you cared for a change," she went on very suavely. "Your music alone would be very acceptable, and if you would, you could give my cousin lessons. My father has been thinking of getting her good instruction."

I knew not what to say. Here, indeed, was a strange and wonderful chance. I hesitated and stammered in my surprise.

"You would like to think it over?" she said.

At this juncture Dr. Shaw returned.

"I have just been trying to tempt your chief musician Dr. Shaw," she said.

They began to go towards the door.

"Indeed! how so?" asked my friend gravely. She told him in her measured tones as we went with them to the door.

"Well, what does he say?" asked Shaw, I thought a little anxiously.

"He has said nothing yet," she replied with a dash of provocation in her tone.

"I should like to think it over. I am delighted with the idea," said I, to whom the proposal seemed more and more advantageous.

Good-bye was said. She held my hand a moment, for emphasis, I thought, as she said:

"Good-bye! You can let us know on Wednesday."

The carriage drove off, and I turned back with Shaw.

"Take care, my boy—take care!" said the doctor. "You are in the toils; take care!"

CHAPTER III.

A DECIDED STEP.

How well I can imagine the scene, which I cannot see! St. Bartimeus's *en fête* always appealed grimly to what was left of the humorous side of my nature. The brightness of light and of colour which was so lost on the persons chiefly concerned; the floral and other decorations, which the sensitive fingers of patients helped to contrive, and which were greeted with so much admiration by the fleeting visitors, who crossed our dark orbit for a night, and came no more; the stir of preparation which heralded the visits of the children of light to the children of darkness; the cares and the vanities which bridged that dreadful gulf more firmly than the mockery of a sympathy, which tried in vain to forget its own security—all these things usually moved me only to an unwholesome mirth. I kept apart in spirit even from my blind fellows, reserving a nook of special darkness for myself. They were not like me, luckily for them. They had brought their past lives with them into their strange land, and kept touch unimaginatively with those who loved them. I had found my new life so

awful that I had lost the saving sense of the reality of the wholesome homeliness that surrounded us all. To-day, while we were busied, under competent direction, in fitting up our large hall for the entertainment of the evening, I had lost much of the armour of fierce despondency in which I trusted. I felt very little like that blind mixture of blind Milton and the Devil whom he portrays, on which I had somewhat tried to mould my character. It was not without shame that I felt an actual sensation of exhilaration as I did my fair share in carrying a heavy piano from one room to another. Nor was it in the old uninterested spirit that I ran my fingers over the keys, when we had deposited the instrument in its new place, and made the large empty room ring and re-echo with strains of almost aggressive jubilance. I knew very well that, beside those whom I should respect as musicians, my powers were as nothing. The applause I had received in old days had gratified, but it had never deceived me. I had loved music too truly to dishonour it by thinking that my attainments were worth a thought, and now I rolled off my thanks to it for rewarding my devotion by bringing me back into the warm circle of human sympathies. I should no longer be outcast. I should no longer be useless. The imperious and mysterious Giulia Beaufoy had owned the spell of my music; the gentle-voiced cousin was to profit by my powers of instruction. Life seemed positively about to relax into a smile

once more, and the grimly humorous view of St.Bartimeus's *en fête* had given place to the eagerly expectant.

"So you're determined to despise the warnings of friendship?" said Dr. Shaw, as we stood by the fire in the hall expecting momentarily the arrival of the earliest guests.

"In what way, doctor?"

"In leaving us, and going to the Beaufoys."

"I don't see how I can stay here," said I; "you don't think I am likely to recover."

"I can't tell," said Shaw, rather testily. He hated to be pressed on a point where he did not feel justified in giving a decided opinion. "You're so impatient. One of the main objects of this place is to give people a chance of recovering in peace. Yours is a curious case. It is chiefly nervous. A morbid nervous state, and a shock, slight to anybody else, serious to you, were the real causes of your loss of sight. It *might* return under favourable conditions. You won't give yourself a chance."

I put very little faith in Shaw's medical views of my case, clever and successful as he undoubtedly was. I had too good reason to believe that he really regarded mine as hopeless. As a really strong feeling of friendship had grown up between us, I put these occasionally hopeful views down to his desire to encourage me, and, at present particularly, to his wish to keep me at the Home, and more especially to preserve me from the imaginary, and to

me rather inviting, dangers of the Basilisk, Miss Beaufoy.

"Well, doctor," I said, "if that's your view, I am much more likely to meet with some homœopathic cure out in the world than in this security. And I can't go on living on charity like this for ever."

"Bosh!" said Shaw. "'A wilful man will have his way.' These entertainments won't go on half so well without you."

"I can come over to them," I said. "Besides, the matter isn't settled yet. I have not seen Mr. Beaufoy, and he will have something to say to it all."

"He will only have to say ditto to his daughter, depend upon it," he replied grimly. "Though I should say she is about the only person he would take his orders from."

"What is he like?" I asked for the first time, for I had rather avoided the subject when it had become so interesting to me, and so distasteful to the good doctor.

"Like? Oh, he's quiet, and as hard as nails. Something between a groom and a dean, and talks like an ideal schoolmaster."

"Is he old?"

"He's grey, in a hard robust way, with an eye as blue as ice, and as keen as lightning."

"I hope he won't sit by while I give my lessons," was all I could say.

A loud peal at the front-door bell brought our conversation to a close. I made my way to a sofa near the piano, which was convenient for me in the discharge of my duties, and there awaited the beginning of the proceedings, and whatever events fate might have in store for me. Shaw assumed his post to welcome the early arrivals.

Gradually the room begins to fill. The first comers are apparently subdued in some measure by the size and emptiness of the room, for they talk in a subdued tone, and suddenly drop their voices to a whisper; a somewhat otiose piece of courtesy, for I know very well that it means they are talking of me. They are soon relieved from their solitary prominence, as the rustle of dresses and sound of voices become continuous, and ere long the general hum of conversation enfolds my individuality, and the old feeling of lost-fellowship begins to recur. The seats are not arranged regularly, as for a concert, but for some time the visitors, with gregarious coyness, avoid the front places, and I am left in comparative seclusion on my sofa near the grand piano.

Presently Shaw comes up, and asks me to play something to set things going. I obey and notice with satisfaction that my efforts are attended with complete success; for the conversation, at best a busy buzz, rises soon to full power, and an occasional pause in a *fortissimo* passage breaks off strong threads of talk with a resounding twang, to the dis-

may of the surprised talkers. I resume my place on the large sofa, and relapse into solitude. People approach close, but none speak to me. I thrill with expectancy at the sweep of light skirts, but they pass to and fro, and make no stay. My services are called into requisition for several accompaniments, and it seems to me that the evening is slipping away at a great pace, and, so far as my interests are concerned, in vain.

At last, at the conclusion of a thunderous performance upon the aggrieved piano, I am conscious of someone sitting down beside me, and the voice I have been expecting to hear sounds at last.

"How do you do, Mr. Coplestone?" and the hand which I instinctively raise is taken in a firm and emphatic grasp.

"I began to think you were not coming, Miss Beaufoy, and that the fruits of our practising would be wasted."

"We are late," she said. "My father wished us to wait for him, but he was so late I have come without him, after all."

This was rather disappointing to me, as I was anxious to have the scheme she had broached set upon a firmer footing.

"Is Miss Fortescue here?" I asked.

"Mary," she said, "here is Mr. Coplestone, whom you met the other day."

I found, or imagined that Miss Fortescue had been

standing close by. She spoke in her sweet subdued voice, and I begged that she would find a place beside me.

"Have you thought any more of the plan of taking music-lessons?" I asked.

"I should like it very much," she began rather hesitatingly, as if unaccustomed to be consulted in matters concerning herself.

"Oh, we have not forgotten," broke in her cousin in a tone from which all the charm seemed to have departed. Then, having apparently asserted Miss Fortescue out of the conversation, she proceeded in a different tone:

"I have spoken to my father about it, and he sees no objection at all. He means to talk to you about it to-night."

At this juncture she was called upon to sing, and when the song was over she was engaged in conversation by some strangers, and I resumed my place on the sofa.

"Are you here still, Miss Fortescue?" I asked.

She was. I began to think that where she was once placed she was in the habit of remaining. I had already formed a distinct and pleasant picture of her.

As she made no effort to begin a conversation, I was constrained to fall back upon the proposed music-lessons. She stood thawed, and we conversed with some freedom. She seemed extremely simple, and even childish in some respects, but I could not form any clear idea of her age.

"I suppose you go out a good deal?" I hazarded.

"No, not much; I don't care much about it. My cousin used to go out a good deal more, and then I sometimes went with her, but now she dosen't care about it."

"Do you live at your uncle's?" I asked.

"Yes," she answered, and seemed to be going to say more, but checked herself. She was evidently constrained, and from what I had heard of the imperial Beaufoy's manner to her, I imagined that her life was not exactly a very happy one.

"You are fond of music?" I asked.

"Oh yes!" she said with an approach to fervour.

"Then you will find regularly studying it a great interest."

"I'm sure I shall. I almost fear it won't come true," she said naïvely, and then laughed an embarrassed little laugh.

"Here comes my cousin," she said in a much less friendly tone than she had used during most of our little chat.

"Is Mr. Beaufoy there?"

"Yes; he is coming here too."

"Mr. Coplestone," said the voice of Miss Beaufoy, "here is my father."

I rose, and bowed to darkness in his presumable direction.

"Mr. Coplestone," said a very hard, dry voice, crisp and precise, "my daughter has spoken to me about your musical abilities. I should like to have a little conversation with you."

A movement was being made for refreshments, so Mr. Beaufoy suggested that we should remain where we were. We remained accordingly.

"If you come," he said incisively, "these are my requirements. You will give lessons to my niece, and help my daughter in her music. You will be able to give me considerable assistance in scientific pursuits in which I am interested. You will live as one of the family. We are a very quiet family; I do not approve of much going out, and I have a very strong objection to tattle and gossip. I will pay you for your services £100 a year. You will see me before we go, and then you can give me your answer."

With this he turned, and walked away with a firm and creaking tread down the room.

I stood in a maze for a minute. Whatever conditions had been offered, I believe I should have accepted them, so delightful was the idea of once more becoming a factor in the world. But I had not thought for a moment of the possibility of being paid for my services. £100 a year seemed a magnificent prospect. Out of that I could make some small return to St. Bartimeus's. True, Mr. Beaufoy

struck me, as far as I could judge, as being one of the hardest of men; but in my exultation, I was prepared to face hosts of hard men. I clapped my hands together in the now silent room, and exclaimed:

"Splendid, splendid!"

I was thinking of my prospects.

"You will come, then?" said a soft voice close to me.

It was Mary Fortescue. I felt somewhat ashamed.

"I didn't know anyone was here," I said.

"Oh, I am so sorry. I ought to have spoken," she answered, as if ashamed of having taken advantage of my blindness.

"Are you alone here?" I asked in surprise.

"Yes," she said; "they have all gone to supper."

"And left you alone." Certainly they were not thoughtful people, the Beaufoys. "If you will accept a blind man's guidance," I said, "I will conduct you to the supper-room; but I fear you will have to take some care of me."

"Thank you," she said in the sweetest tone, and I felt a light touch on my arm, and she skilfully steered me through all the chairs and ottomans into the hall, and so into the babel of voices and the supper-room.

This little incident affected me strongly. This timid, and, as I began to think, isolated young girl, reduced to

the escort of a blind man, to whom she, with infinite tact, acted as a guide, seemed all at once to have established a claim both on my gratitude and my protection.

Ere long I heard the voice of Mr. Beaufoy in conversation with Dr. Shaw. They took me into the hall.

"I have been talking to Dr. Shaw," said the hard-voiced Beaufoy. "He sees no objection to your coming."

I thanked Shaw in my heart.

"I will come with pleasure," said I.

"Then the sooner the better," said Mr. Beaufoy. "Can you come this week ?"

"Yes," I said. "Will Saturday do ?"

"By all means."

"Then I will come on Saturday."

When they were going I thanked Miss Beaufoy for her kindness.

"Good-bye," she said, "I shall expect you to be very useful to me."

"Good-bye," said Mary Fortescue in a low voice. "Thank you so much for you kindness. I hope we shall be able to be of use to you."

"Come—come," said Mr. Beaufoy's loud voice, and then to me: "We shall expect you on Saturday."

CHAPTER IV.

A NEW DEPARTURE.

I WAS quite surprised, and not a little touched, at the amount of good feeling elicited by the news of my departure from St. Bartimeus's. It was not altogether pleasant to realise that one had been neglecting so many possibilities of friendship, and keeping selfishly aloof from people who were full of simple kindness. Not that friendly manifestations are necessarily worth much when bestowed to speed a parting guest. It is easy enough to show a little extra civility to one whom you never expect to see again. And in our little community there was a certain importance attached to going away, which made me for the time a personage of some note, so that, possibly, a proportion of the interest manifested by my worthy "co-mates and brothers in exile," in my pending departure was due to a desire to be associated as closely as possible with the involuntary hero of the hour. I remember how, at school, the dignity of an unexpected journey made any of us feel considerably taller; and how boys with whom we were, under ordinary circumstances, on terms of a decidedly unsettled kind, would gladly lend a hand in the preparations for departure, and

help to carry bag or rug, if need were, to the station. Some such spirit as this was abroad in the Home, and brought my school-days vividly back to my mind. The care that had be taken of me, and the little I could do for myself in the matter of my journey took me back, indeed, to an earlier period of my school-life than I could distinctly remember. Other feelings also were working in my breast which were amusingly, if somewhat pitifully childish. I was, during the last days of my sojourn under Dr. Shaw's care, in a state of suppressed excitement and impatience, such as I used to feel as a boy, when within measurable distance of the holidays. I was almost fiercely eager to mix in some sort with the world again. I did not consider how small that world must necessarily be. I only realised that I was no longer to be shut away into a corner, classed with other sufferers, whose fellow in affliction I could not bear to think myself. And above all there was the strange and growing charm of Miss Beaufoy, with her power, of which Shaw had so evil an opinion, and the sympathetic chord struck by the gentle voice and kindly words of her quiet cousin. To Mr. Beaufoy I did not give much thought. The human interest was centred for me in the two women. And so, living in a state of concentrated expectation, the hours went slowly by for me, till the time of my emancipation should arrive.

At last the eventful Saturday came. I awoke, feeling as if I were about to begin a new life, leaving the helplessness and the suffering of years behind me. Shaw, not for the first time, rather rallied me on the joy with which I was preparing to leave the Home, where, in truth, I had met nothing but kindness. I did not attempt to dissemble my joy, but I assured him, in the most forcible words I could find, of my sense of all his goodness to me, and of all the advantages of St. Bartimeus's. I thought, still like a schoolboy, of the pleasure, and even the triumph, of coming to visit him and my former associates among the patients, with something of the glory of on old boy revisiting his old comrades who are still *in statu pupillari.*

"My dear doctor," I said warmly, "I can never forget all you have done for me."

"I haven't done much," said Shaw, who loved to be correct on professional points. "You're neither better nor worse than when you came, except that you have picked up marvellously in spirits, and therefore in general health, during the last few weeks."

"I don't mean what you've done for me professionally," I answered. "That, no doubt, is all man could have done. But you've kept me alive. That's the long and short of it."

"I've kept you alive for Miss Beaufoy to take you off, and try some of her wiles on you."

"What wiles can Miss Beaufoy try on a blind music-master?"

"I don't know what she can do. You can't see her as I can. There is nothing straightforward, nothing plainly good about her, or any of her works."

"I will be on my guard, doctor," said I, laughing. It was really ridiculous, the way in which the mention, or even the idea of Miss Beaufoy affected the cool and kind-hearted Shaw. "I will come and report progress soon, and you shall judge whether things are getting really desperate."

"You'll never come," said Shaw. "Beaufoy seems to have the strongest objection to letting anybody either into or out of his house now. Since his wife's death they scarcely ever go out themselves, and no one, so far as I know, ever goes there."

"Well, I will take care of myself, but I certainly will see you now and then. He can't surely make any objection."

"He has had two or three patients from here in various capacities where they could be generally useful to him. We never saw anything of them, and when I have made enquiries, or invited them here, he has always put me off. No; it will be good-bye to us when you once get to the Beaufoys."

I was rather pleased at this. The idea of being over-

ridden in any lawful matter of choice by Mr. Beaufoy, or by anyone else, now that my spirits had revived with the interest and hope of the new engagement, did not commend itself to me for an instant. I smiled at Shaw's gloomy tone, and held my hand out to him, saying no more than, "We shall see." An expression which I used from habit, but which sent a prophetic pleasure to my heart whenever I inadvertently uttered it.

It had been arranged, in accordance with a letter which Mr. Beaufoy had written to Shaw, that I should drive to my destination, which was situated in a remote part of a north-western suburb, round which the tide of railways and villa residences was steadily rising, but which still maintained intact a good deal of the quietness and remoteness of the country. Not caring to be burdened with luggage, I had sent my heavier baggage on by carrier, and was consequently in the happy position of being able to make my journey almost unencumbered.

I remember with great distinctness every incident, almost every feeling of the last few hours of my stay at St. Bartimeus's. It was a very close September afternoon. A hot sunny morning with a strong wind, which seemed saturated with the past heat of the summer, had given place to a sunless noon, and now the wind had fallen, and an ominous stillness seemed to shut us off from the noises of the outer world, and to magnify into startling signifi-

cance the sudden moving of a chair near at hand, and to give a hollow solemnity to the casual utterances of familiar voices.

"I think the sooner you're off the better," said Shaw, who was a little bit fidgety when he was responsible for other people's doings. "It feels very like thunder; and a hansom is not the most desirable place in a heavy storm.

"It's not very far to go," said I.

"Far enough to give time for a storm to gather and break," said Shaw.

On the point of departure I was conscious of a sort of regret, and almost repented of the eagerness with which I had looked forward to my release. But any thoughts of this sort were cut short by the sound of wheels, and the announcement that my cab was at the door.

Dr. Shaw took me to the cab, and saw me safely settled.

"Good-bye!" he said. "Don't forget to come and see me when you can."

"I will certainly come," said I, and I fully resolved that I would.

"Where to, sir?" asked Toplis, the cabman, a trustworthy functionary, who was generally employed by Shaw.

"Mr. Beaufoy's, Hanover Lodge, Millwood-road, Frognal."

"Very good, sir."

"You won't get there before the rain comes on, I'm afraid, Toplis?"

"That won't come on yet, sir," said Toplis in the voice of a man who was accustomed to take reassuring views of things in general, especially the catching of trains for the encouragement of fidgety spinsters.

With another cordial "Good-bye," I left the peaceful precincts of St. Bartimeus's, and, under the care of the skilful charioteer Toplis, was soon bowling along the Edgware-road, *en route* to Hanover Lodge.

For a time my busy thoughts and anticipations were accompanied by the noise of the traffic, but after going some distance we turned off to the left, and then, the farther we went, the quieter it became, and I noticed more than ever the deep stillness of the air, from which all the life of sound seemed to have been sucked up by the prevailing electricity. I felt it in every nerve; I fairly tingled with it; and under the oppression of the atmosphere I gradually lost the buoyancy of expectation, and began to look forward with some degree of anxiety to the unknown life that lay before me. More and more oppressive became the stillness. The sudden rush of a distant train made me flinch; the roll of approaching wheels, mistaken for the inevitable thunder, left me with my nervous anxiety disappointed and increased. After what seemed to me a very

long drive, we turned on to a road, which seemed much less frequented than those we had previously traversed. The wheels jolted unevenly now and then, and their noise and the fall of the horse's hoofs were deadened, as if we were going along a partially-grass-grown way. After a little while our speed slackened, and we pulled up.

"Gate!" shouted Toplis.

"Where are we, Toplis?" I called.

"This here's Hanover Lodge, sir. Leastways it's the gate, but it ain't open. Gate!" he shouted again.

"All right!" called a gruff voice.

"All right!" said Toplis. "It ain't all right, with the rain a waiting to come down."

I heard the click of a latch, and then the cab-doors were thrown open.

"Ketch hold of my arm, sir," said the man with the gruff voice. "You must get down here."

"Why don't you open the gate, and I can drive the gentleman up to the 'ouse?" said Toplis wrathfully.

"You can drive the gentleman where you please outside," said the gruff individual. "But the guv'nor don't choose to hev his gravel cut up by a lot of 'ansom cab 'orses."

"All right, Toplis," said I. "Here, take the portmanteau."

A hand took my bag from me; with a hearty "Good

afternoon" from the worthy cabman, I committed myself to the guidance of the strange man.

He took me through a small gate—at least, so I judged from the fact that he seemed to sidle through in front of me, and that I touched the post somewhat roughly in passing.

"Is it far to the house?" I asked, for I felt a drop of rain fall on my hand.

"Some bit of a way," he answered surlily.

So I said no more. This was rather disappointing. There was a disagreeable want of consideration in sacrificing a stranger's convenience to the appearance of the gravel, which struck me as almost ludicrous, but, being unable to see, I felt it as the more inexcusable.

We walked on in silence for some distance. I began to have a considerable respect for the size of Mr. Beaufoy's grounds.

"This is a large place?" I remarked, for the silence was oppressive.

My guide gave an affirmative grunt.

Just then I heard a train come rushing on, as it seemed, under our feet.

"What's that?" I exclaimed.

"This 'ere's a bridge. The line runs through the grounds," he replied, and we relapsed into silence.

A short, abrupt peal of thunder broke the silence, and then it rolled majestically and long over the sky.

"We'd best hurry," said my guide, quickening his pace.

I was walking close to him, having refused his arm, cautioning him to let me know if any obstacles should occur in our path; but I did not care to run without some surer knowledge of my guide. So I kept him down to a quick walk. Big raindrops began to patter on my hat and break on my hands, and to rustle continuously on leaves all about us.

The man swore to himself, and I wondered the more at the kind of gardener or lodge-keeper that such a man as Mr. Beaufoy employed.

Again the clouds gave tongue, and the cry was wrathfully taken up all about the vault of heaven.

"Come on, sir; there's the house," said my guide.

"How far?"

"Fifty steps, straight across the grass now. D—— it, I don't want to get wet through!"

I would not quicken—out of spite, I fear. I heard the sound of an opening door.

"There's Miss Beaufoy at the door," said the man, as the rain began to come down like a waterfall.

"Come—quick!" cried the clear imperious tones of Miss Beaufoy's voice.

Jumping at this as an order, my guide set off running, calling to me:

"Come on—straight!"

I followed. I trod upon grass, which the drought and the rain together made very slippery. I fell, but not heavily.

"Here—this way!" cried the voice again.

I looked towards her, and resumed my progress. I pictured her waiting in the doorway. I should be among friends again in a minute.

Then there was a sudden and an awful crash, a white rending and a shivering, as it were, of my senses and of my consciousness—an awful tingling, as if the life of pain were dragged into cold air, and then a stunning shock seemed to hurl me into unconsciousness.

CHAPTER V.

AWAKING.

In the midst of a terrible mental chaos, a state of conscious inability to comprehend my own personality, I am brought back to a semblance of sense by hearing a murmur of many voices, whispered unrestful words, which irritate my faculties without redeeming me from the nightmare of a lost identity. Sense slowly seems to permeate a frame reluctant to revive; but, surely as the tide gains on the shore, the senses left void by that earthquake ebb of consciousness are filled by its returning flow. Gradually the relations of mind and body were resumed, but ere the sharp and anxious whisperings conveyed meaning to my mind, I strove to feel the assurance of bodily existence, and made a feeble effort to raise my hand. The effort was a failure, but it helped to restore me. I soon tried again, and this time was aware of exerting muscular power. I raised my right arm a moment, and dropped it helplessly. I felt like one partially paralysed.

"Hush!" said a voice. "He moves."

This time the words were plain, and I understood; but

where I was, or what had happened, I still failed to grasp, nor did I yet think or care to know. The idea of reality was like light in darkness to my returning senses. The vague horror of a smothered personality had been so terrible, that instinctively I sought to greet the human brotherhood on finding myself, under whatever circumstances, restored to it. I again reached forth my hand, this time more strongly.

"He's coming round," said a harsh voice. Then louder: "Wait! don't fetch a doctor."

I did not yet attach much meaning to what I heard. I chiefly craved for some reassurance, some sign of sympathy. Again I lifted my hand towards the voices of fellow-men.

This time my mute appeal was not made in vain. A hand took mine with a delicate but comforting clasp. Feeling that here was something to keep me safe, even in the nebulous wilderness of forgetfulness, I gave up the tension of struggling to regain my footing among realities, and slipped contentedly into vacuity.

From a dreamless slumber I awoke with clearer faculties. I remembered with no effort the incidents of my journey from St. Bartimeus's, my arrival at the lodge-gates, my progress to the house, the gathering storm, the opening door, the voice that had called to me through the storm, then the crash that had hurled me into insensibility. This

time there was no painful striving to resume the powers of life. A feeling of safety and rest pervaded me. I no longer sought to move—to prove the existence of bodily powers. I was content to be.

Time had not yet resumed its significance. I had no idea how long I had been where I was; no notion whether it were day or night, or what day or night it was. I did not trouble my serenity of rest with speculating upon it. I might have been in a swoon of an hour's duration; I might have been sleeping an enchanted sleep of many centuries.

The touch of reality was again supplied by voices. I awoke from another spell of slumber to hear the sound of incisive whispering—that whispering, which is of all sounds the most irritating to nerves that long for quiet, and of all means to escape hearing the most futile.

"He must be moved from here," said a man's voice—Mr. Beaufoy's. I remembered all about him and myself, as if I had no concern in the matter.

A woman's step came close to me.

"He is asleep—sound asleep," said the voice of Miss Beaufoy.

This struck me as being quite true. I was still outside all the active concerns of life.

'There is nothing the matter," said Mr. Beaufoy, close to

me. "That's a quiet and wholesome sleep. I was quite right in not having a doctor in."

"He might be moved now," said Miss Beaufoy. "There is evidently nothing the matter."

"He ought not to have been brought in here," said her father in a tone of great irritation.

"It was Hardy brought him in. He ought to have known better."

"Hardy is a fool. He was frightened out of his wits by the thunder."

"The lightning, I should think. It was enough to frighten him."

"Nothing was enough to justify him in disobeying orders. And Mary, too—she was in here."

"Oh, Mary doesn't matter. If she had the sense to see anything, she would never dare think of it or speak of it."

"Where is she?"

"She went to her room crying, of course. She won't soon forget what I said to her."

There was a cruelty in the way this was said, which reminded me of the tone I had noticed before in some of Miss Beaufoy's remarks to her cousin. It brought back associations still more strongly, and woke me up more thoroughly. I recalled also the hand that had been, as it seemed, stretched out to me in the abyss from the whole-

sale living world of substance. That clasp, so full of womanly sympathy and help, could not have been from the hand of the imperious creature who spoke so coldly and so cruelly.

Mary Fortescue sent away in tears! My coming had brought trouble to her already. I pondered over it with ruthful feelings, while the whispered conversation between father and daughter went on unheeded. The note of trouble being thus struck, what I had heard began to gather some shape and meaning to me. I had begun my new career here by causing evident inconvenience. My presence in this particular room was manifestly highly displeasing. It occurred to me that I ought to apologise and depart, but I did nothing. My mind ran on the idea with some sort of satisfaction, but I could not think how anything of the kind was to be expressed in action.

Again Mr. Beaufoy's voice came to my ears—angry, evidently. It seemed that he could not get the attendance that he wanted. He was fuming, and the calm tones of his daughter evidently did not assuage his annoyance.

"The man must have lost his senses as well. He and Gibbs both out together! I must have him" (evidently speaking of me) "out of this before he wakes."

"What does it matter," said Miss Beaufoy, "if he does wake? He can't see."

Even this had a sarcastic ring in it, as though not

being able to see were a defect worthy of scorn instead of pity.

"What of that?" said her father quickly. "That other fellow couldn't see, but he found out a lot—a lot more than was good for him," he added with a short snigger.

"That'll do, father," said the lady, in a tone that served to show that she was morally the master of the twain. "If you had been less fidgety he would not have been put on the track of any suspicions."

"Hush!" said Mr. Beaufoy in a fierce whisper. "D—— that Hardy!" he added.

A low whistle sounded somewhere in the room.

"Perhaps that is Hardy," said Miss Beaufoy.

A short conversation seemed now to be taking place, by means of a speaking-tube. I felt more and more uneasy—vaguely uneasy. The tenour of the talk that I had heard gave rise to all sorts of unpleasant ideas, not the least of which, and one that gained strength rapidly after its first inception, was that I was in the position of a spy—an involuntary spy certainly. For much that I had heard seemed at first to be external altogether to myself, but as I regained more and more of the usual mental balance, I remembered everything only too distinctly; and my mind busily employed its recovered strength in reading the riddles presented to it. I did not yet fully grasp the situation, but I realised enough to know that I ought to assert my consciousness.

"That fool, Hardy," said Beaufoy. "We can move our friend now he's come back."

A further conversation ensued, which I did not catch, I then heard Miss Beaufoy say:

"Besides, Mary can look after him then. It will be a blessing to keep her employed in that, until she can take to her music."

"She's a nuisance!" said Beaufoy. "I don't know what to do with her."

"You *must* keep her," Miss Beaufoy replied, with the same scorn which I had before noticed. "She goes with the property."

"D ——!" said her father.

It was a long time since I had heard profane language. The blind I found a singularly patient race, and I was the more struck with hearing strong expressions from the mouth of one who had been painted as a precise and formal benefactor.

The power of motion seemed suddenly to have returned to me. I essayed to move. The voices ceased. Steps approached me.

"Hush! he's awakening."

I tried to sit up; but the effort was too much.

"How do you feel?" asked Miss Beaufoy, in a more gentle voice than I had expected to hear from the whispered colloquy which had occupied my half-dormant intelligence.

"Thank you, I am all right," I answered. "I shall be able to move presently."

A quick and eager whispering now took place, the purport of which I quite failed to gather. I then heard the gentle chink of glasses, and presently Miss Beaufoy brought me a draught.

"Drink this," she said in a tone of command.

I had no strength to resist even if I had wished to, but I was thirsty, and swallowed what she gave me. Then oblivion fell upon me once more.

* * * *

I awoke again to a strange vision, the strangest I had had in all my years of darkness. Time seemed to have rolled back to the period before my calamity. I opened my eyes—in the old sense of the words I opened my eyes. A dim, soft light met my senses. I lay and wondered, and delighted in the vision. I seemed to be in a small room, with some amount of luxury in its fittings, as well as I could judge in the soft light. Strange and beautiful was this vision of a lost sense. I enjoyed it too exquisitely to move, or even to think much. And all was very still.

Then I heard a sound—the sound of an opening door. I turned my eyes that way, and sure enough the door was opened. The vision had some consistency. Then there approached a figure—a woman's figure. Dimly and vaguely she seemed to me. She came towards me. The

soft light played most realistically on her dress. She stooped towards me, and, the light fell most realistically on shining hair. Two soft kind eyes looked into mine for a moment, and lest I should too soon wake up to my darkness again, I dropped my eyelids, and trembled with a hope that was almost a terror.

CHAPTER VI.

SUSPICIONS.

I CHERISHED the possibility of this restoration with a trembling hope, which shrunk from putting it to the test. Whether the vision which had manifested itself were a freak of imagination or a wonderful reality, I dared not for a time attempt to decide.

I heard a light step moving about the room; I was aware of a soothing presence. Who it was I did not know. Should I find it to be really in the likeness of the vision that I had vaguely seen? This was the question which I dreaded, yet more and more burned to solve.

In this suspense, moments seemed to expand to hours. With a heart beating violently from the agitation of the moment, I opened my eyes.

I could not be dreaming now! There was light! A soft subdued light, just as I had fancied it, or seen it on first awaking.

This time I would test the vision to the utmost. It should afford me a temporary if delusive joy, or confirm

my wildest hope, by proving me restored to the land of light.

Everything was indeed very dim, but this rather reassured me. I had beheld familiar scenes often enough during the years of my blindness, depicted with all the delusive clearness of a waking dream. Precise and distinct in detail they had always been, but there had never been any novelty, never any reassuring vagueness. Now, as I gazed into the hardly-lighted room, I was conscious for the first time of a reassuring novelty—of an indistinctness which spoke strangely and sweetly of reality. I saw nothing very striking. When I had fully realised the sense of light, I became accustomed to puzzling perspectives, and objects began to draw themselves together into recognisable shapes. The foot-rail of a brass-bedstead is not a promising text for poetic raptures. But as this prosaic object grew into consistency from confusion, it struck a note of wild exultation in my heart, with which the joy of the Greeks on sighting the sea could, I should imagine, bear little comparison. I turned my head upon the pillow, towards the light. Instinctively I shrunk from too full a view, even of that shaded illumination. This was a precaution which had never occurred to me in any dreams of restored sight. With care and caution I looked. The shaded light of a lamp fell upon a small table, and upon the form of a woman standing near it.

I made a slight movement in extending my field of observation, and, sure enough, the figure moved, as if in response.

"Are you awake?" asked a soft voice, the voice which I had already learned to know as that of Mary Fortescue.

"Is that Miss Fortescue?" I asked.

"Yes. Can I do anything for you?"

"What time is it?" was my next question.

"Nearly half-past nine."

"How long have I been here?"

I had no notion of the lapse of time. It might have been days since I set out on my eventful journey; it proved to be only hours.

"You came this afternoon," she said. "How do you feel?"

"I am quite well now; only a little confused."

"It was terrible," she said, "that flash of lightning."

"It stunned me."

"Yes; we thought you were killed."

I felt a momentary impulse to confess all that I believed I owed to that shock; but a fear of finding myself deceived after all, and a natural secretiveness, intensified by years of lonely self-communing, restrained me.

"Would you like anything?" she asked.

"Not now, thank you. Is this my room? How did I come here?"

"Hardy and the gardener brought you here; but you were quite unconscious. Hardy will wait on you for the present," she added. "He is rather rough, but I think he will be careful. You mustn't talk much," she said, rather in the tone of a nurse to a child. "I will send you some supper, and we can talk to-morrow if you are better."

I felt very loath to be left alone, and reluctant to be consigned to the care of Hardy. I believed directly that he would prove to be the man who had conducted me from the lodge-gates up to the house. And so it proved. For while I lay, musing, still in a sort of trance, on my position, and the wonderful possibilities that seemed to be opening to me, I heard a heavy step, and a man entered the room. I tested my powers of vision again, and again I was not disappointed. Very indistinctly, but still unmistakably, I perceived the figure of a man who seemed to carry something.

"Is that Hardy?" I asked.

"Yes, sir," said the gruff voice which had greeted my first arrival at the lodge. "I've brought you some supper," he continued. "How will you have it?"

I sat up, and Hardy, with more skill and kindness than I was prepared to give him credit for, helped me to dispose comfortably of some light refreshments.

There was a certain handiness in the way he looked after me, which was strangely at variance with the gruffness of

his voice and demeanour, as exemplified out of doors at my arrival ; and though I felt a sort of repugnance to him of the instinctive sort, I was conscious that I might have fallen into the hands of a very much less serviceable valet.

He was not given to conversation, which quite suited me, and having made all snug for the night, and directed me as to the bearings of an electric-bell if I wished to summon him at any time, he turned the light out and departed. In spite of the strangeness of my position, and the elation of the awakened hopes of recovery, I soon slept, and slept soundly.

The morning brought me a greater joy than it often falls to the lot of man to experience. Lying half awake, the dominant thought of last night began to take shape, and to give colour to my dreams; then, having lost myself in unconsciousness awhile, I struggled to grasp what the joy was which haunted me. I awoke fully, at last, with a start. I opened my eyes. It was true ! The wildest of the joyful dreams was true ! I *had* regained my sight ! My vision was still dim and clouded, but I was no longer in darkness. I saw the blessed light of day through the window-blinds. I saw the shapes of the articles of furniture in the room. Ere long Hardy came to call me, bringing my breakfast on a tray. I had slept till late, and breakfast was over. He brought a message that Miss Beaufoy hoped I was better, and begging me to suit my own con-

venience entirely about coming down. I dismissed Hardy, saying that I would ring if I required any assistance. I could not bear to associate my recovery in any way with one for whom I had conceived so instinctive an aversion.

After spending a leisurely time of exquisite delight in testing the limits of my recovered sense, I was ready at last to encounter my new associates. On summoning my attendant he informed me that he believed the ladies were out, but he would take me into the library, where one or other of them would be likely to return before long. Accordingly he led me down a broad staircase, across a spacious hall, into a room with long windows opening into a garden, and, guiding me to a chair, there left me. I took up a book to read, but as yet the power had not returned to me. I went to the window. I saw for the first time for four long years the blessed light of the sun as it lay in mellow warmth upon the broad lawn. The trees with late September colours in the leaves spread out a hazy picture of beauty, of which my remembrance and imagination readily supplied the details, for in truth it was still but a limited and confused vision I enjoyed. I opened one of the French-windows, and stood out in the sunshine. The quiet was intense, and I longed for some companionship. Having taken several slow turns on the grass, I sought to re-enter the house, and seeing, as I supposed, the window through which I had come, I pushed it open and

entered. It was not the room I expected. As far as I could judge it was a sort of study. The door was partly open, so I crossed the room and went through the door, with the design of making my way back into the library again. The sound of voices arrested me, and changed my intention. I was anxious to find myself among my fellow-creatures in this strange household, and although I shrunk from it, I felt that I ought to confide to my hosts the partial recovery with which I was blessed. I found myself in a lobby, from the end of which the voices came. I went towards them, and came to another room, dark and small, with a thick and heavy door, which was standing half-open. I stood upon the threshold. A tall woman was standing with her back towards me. Through a door in the side of the little room I saw the gleam of a small furnace, and a moment after the face of a man appeared there, which grew white with rage or terror. At this the woman turned, and threw her hands out in front of me.

"He is blind," she said, shortly and fiercely; and the man, who had reached something from a shelf, put it down on the table.

That something was a revolver.

I resolved not to confide all at once in Mr. Beaufoy.

"How did you find your way in here?" he asked with a rather abortive attempt to speak calmly.

"I was guided by the sound of voices," I answered; "and the door was open."

"*I* left it open," said Miss Beaufoy quickly.

I attempted no word of apology. There was that about the whole proceedings which curdled both my courtesy and my frankness.

"I was trying to get back to the library," I said coldly.

"It's all right," whispered Miss Beaufoy scornfully to her father. Then to me softly: "Come, I will lead you back to the library."

CHAPTER VII.

THE SHADOW OF THE FUTURE.

MISS BEAUFOY laid her hand on my arm, and led me out of the mysterious room. In the library I breathed freely again. There was no air of mystery there, and the smell of the grass, and the September leaves was sweet and wholesome.

I resisted with difficulty the impulse to look with eager curiosity upon the face of the woman who had occupied so much of my thoughts of late. A prudent instinct came to my aid. It was no business of hers, and in no way due to her or hers, if I had marvellously recovered my vision. I felt that it was not a thing to be lightly revealed; and, indeed, how could I tell that the restoration would be permanent?

"My father is a little *brusque* and nervous," she said, when we were seated in the library. "He was rather startled by your appearance just now."

"I am sorry," I said, "to have begun by making a false move, but it is really very difficult for me to find my way about in a strange house."

Miss Beaufoy's apology was spoken in the most conventionally polite manner conceivable, and would have suggested to my mind nothing more than the idea of a particular and petulant old gentleman who had shown too plainly his irritation at an unwarranted intrusion. But what I had *seen* was the face of guilty terror, and a hand laid readily and instinctively upon a deadly weapon. There was a terrible discrepancy between these things and Giulia Beaufoy's placid explanation of my speedy exit from the regions into which I had unwittingly strayed.

"You will soon learn your way," she answered; "it is a very commonplace house. But my father does not like anybody to go to his study without being asked. He is afraid of his papers and things being mislaid."

"Mr. Beaufoy is a student?"

"He is very fond of philosophical experiments, and likes to be very much alone."

"Do you help him at all?"

"I?" she said, laughing. "Oh no. But I have the *entrée* to his rooms when I want to see him."

She rose and moved towards the window. I stole a look at her with much caution. She stood between me and the light, a tall, graceful figure, with head finely set upon her shoulders, and thick, dark hair. As I looked, filled with strange haunting memories of I knew not what, she turned, and flashed upon me the light of wonderful dark eyes. In

an instant it all came back to me. My boyish infatuation with the beautiful stranger, my distempered visions and feverish walks. The look that had been the last thing I beheld ere darkness had closed upon me—it was she once more. The first eyes that looked straight into mine after I had realised recovery, were those which I had last seen, cruel and hard, outside St. James's Hall that wet night, four years before. The effect of the surprise somewhat unsteadied me, but I contrived not to betray myself, except by a slight start.

"What is it?" she asked with some kindness.

"Nothing," I answered, "the effect of the electric shock, partly."

"Let us have some music," she said, "if it will not worry you."

It would suit me admirably, for I did not feel quite in the mood for a calm and continued conversation.

Then she sang, and sang admirably, some of the songs which we had previously practised together.

I began to feel a certain disinclination for the *tête-à-tête*, which she was evidently in no hurry to abridge. I thought, perhaps, that it was to my blindness that I owed her complacency, and in the new-found pride of restoration I despised such eleemosynary favours.

"I ought not to be idle," I said, in a pause at the end of a song; "I am quite well enough to get

to work. Is Miss Fortescue disposed for any music this morning?"

"Mary could not think of taxing you to-day," she answered, with the touch of contempt and dislike in her tone which I always heard, or fancied I heard, when she mentioned her cousin's name.

"I should not find it in the least a tax," I said.

I was, in truth, becoming very anxious to test my sight again, and to see whether the uncertain but beautiful apparition, which had first brought the notion of recovery to my mind, was indeed the form and face of Mary Fortescue. Was there anything about her to justify the way her cousin spoke of and to her?

Miss Beaufoy did not give me much chance of pursuing the subject, even if I had any justification for so doing.

"I will play to you," she said, and, guiding me to a low easy-chair close beside the music-stool, she seated herself at the piano, and began to play, in a desultory fashion, but with the skill and taste of an accomplished performer. She talked through the music in a manner which was rather fascinating and undoubtedly flattering. But I was curiously on my guard, and actuated by a strange feeling of latent hostility. Still, we talked on all kinds of subjects, music supplying, as it were, the base of our themes. I had had no such conversation for ages. There were poetry and passion in her music and her thoughts, and I felt that if I

had dared to look in her face, and feel the power of her eyes, as I did of her music and her voice, my instinct of distrust would have stood too great a chance of being charmed away. I did glance occasionally, when by her voice I knew that she was not looking towards me, and I saw a pale, clear complexion, and the fringe of long lashes upon the rounded cheek, and the firm but beautiful mouth, till she slowly turned her head towards me again as she talked and played, and it needed all the remembrance of Dr. Shaw's warning stories, and of all the cruelties of tone, and of the strange uncanny whispers while I was recovering from the shock, and of the curious scene in Mr. Beaufoy's little room, to bring back to my mind the assurance that I was not the companion merely of a stately and gracious woman, but dangerously near being enthralled by a mysterious and decidedly unwholesome influence. Still, the situation had its charms, not the least of which was the notion that in this strange fashion I had actually met at last the woman who had been so curiously and so disastrously impressed upon my youthful imagination.

The music and the conversation were interrupted at last by the opening of one of the French-windows.

"Here is Mary," said Miss Beaufoy, still playing, but striking into a less dreamy and poetical vein than she had previously been pursuing.

I rose, and took one look at the girl, who was fastening

the window. It was very much what I had seen before She seemed to be a slender, golden-haired girl, with a face as sweet as the voice that had struck with such comfort to my heart.

She came to me and shook hands.

"I am so glad you are able to come down, Mr. Coplestone," she said. "We were afraid you might be seriously injured."

"I think I ought to have been," I said; "and I ought to have apologised before coming up to the door in a flash of lightning. It's fortunate the cab did not come up the drive, perhaps."

"My uncle is so particular about having the gravel kept neat. We have so few visitors that Hardy did not use his discretion about your cab. It must have seemed dreadfully rude."

I was about to defy all the claims of veracity, and protest that I thought it the most natural and proper thing in the world, when Miss Beaufoy broke in;

"Hardy was perfectly right, Mary," she said, in the manner of an exasperating governess to a naughty child, "He was obeying orders. There is no place for discretion in the matter."

Mary was standing close to me. I looked at her, and saw a bright spot burning in either cheek. But she said nothing.

I felt angry. Why should she take this kind of reproof so tamely? The situation was a little strained. I endeavoured to put matters on a pleasant footing by reverting to the music. The ladies sang a few duets, and Miss Fortescue, at my earnest request, played a little. But there was no pleasure for me now. Miss Beaufoy was singularly exasperating, and took and made opportunities for saying unkind and unpleasant things in a way which aroused every feeling of chivalry within me to stand by the patient, gentle girl, who seemed under some sort of terrorism which prevented her resenting these verbal cruelties and slights.

Once or twice Miss Beaufoy threw out very broad hints that Miss Fortescue should betake herself to the garden to cut fresh flowers for the vases. But when she was about to meekly adopt the suggestion, I struck in with some musical proposal which kept her with us, till at last Miss Beaufoy, apparently vexed at the presence of a third person, moved away from the piano, saying that she had had enough of the instrument for that morning.

"I can go and cut flowers now, if you like, Giulia," said Mary Fortescue apologetically.

"Yes, it ought to have been done before," was all the answer she received.

"May I come with you, Miss Fortescue?" I asked. "If it will not be troubling you too much to be my guide once more."

"I shall be very glad if you will," she said, so kindly and sisterly.

"Oh, Mr. Coplestone," said Giulia, "I want to show you the harmonium in the drawing-room. It's a very fine-toned harmonium, and we must have some pianoforte and harmonium duets."

"I am afraid I must beg you to let me postpone the harmonium," I said. I was thoroughly annoyed by her domineering tone towards her cousin. "I have just asked Miss Fortescue to let me accompany her into the garden."

The Basilisk evidently had a temper. I saw her flash a look of fury upon her cousin, who seemed quite overwhelmed at being pitted against her.

"Oh, never mind," she said timidly, "it doesn't matter at all."

"If you will excuse me," I said, "I would rather go into the garden; the air will do me good."

All my distrust came back a hundredfold, for at this very sensible and moderate request Miss Beaufoy, I observed, became as hard and fierce as a Gorgon.

"You are making a very uncomplimentary choice," she half whispered to me. "That is because you are blind,"—and oh, how cruelly she said it!

CHAPTER VIII.

CONFIDENCES.

I WAS, undoubtedly, interested in this gentle girl, who seemed so ill-placed with her proud and, I feared, tyrannical cousin. The way in which Miss Beaufoy seemed to claim me was more humiliating than flattering, or would have been so, but for the strange malignity of her last remark, which gave an air of mysterious romance to what would otherwise have seemed rather insolent forwardness.

Out in the balmy September sunshine, however, not merely breathing the delicious air and imagining, as in the dreary past, the visible splendour that mocked me with its warmth and its fragrance, but actually beholding once again the beds and banks of flowers, the green grass flooded with sunshine, and the sharp black line of shade; seeing the flickering tracery of the shadows under big elms, and looking up through translucent leaves at fretted visions of deepest blue above; seeing clearly enough now the sweet face and shining hair of the fair guardian by my side, I soon felt such a glow of exultation and rapture, that I forgot for a moment the sombre surroundings of Hanover

Lodge, and felt a strong inclination to take my companion into my confidence, and let my pent-up delight find some sort of outward expression.

But, gazing at her again, the look of constraint and sorrow which was plainly perceptible in her face brought back to my mind, in all its vividness, the idea that she was in some way the victim of oppression, and revived the impulse I had already felt to devote some of my restored power to her service. I contented myself, therefore, with the silent enjoyment of that most beautiful union of nature and art, an old garden, and attempted to improve the occasion by conversation with Mary Fortescue.

"This is a very large place, is it not?" I asked.

"Yes," she said, "it is part of an old park which was broken up many years ago."

"It must be delightful to live in such a place," said I thrilled with the delight of velvety turf and huge quiet trees, which seemed to remain utterly independent of the vulgarising influences of modern bricks and mortar.

"It is a beautiful garden," she said in rather a sad tone.

"Are you not fond of flowers?" I asked.

"Oh yes. I love this garden."

She spoke still with the reserve of one who could have said much to explain why she did not say more.

"I could be perfectly happy in a place like this," I remarked, turning away from her to survey the peaceful

beauty of the scene, lest she should catch too much of the tell-tale intelligence of my opened eyes.

She stooped to pluck a flower, and it was some little while before she answered.

"It is very sweet out here," she said at last, "but it is very lonely in the house."

I did not know her well, and under more ordinary conditions I might not have read so quickly in her voice the tone of appeal, the assurance that she would not resent nor misunderstand. Besides, I was accustomed to the flattering handicap of affliction. People used to be only too ready to treat me on a more intimate footing because I was blind, and it had been one of the sorest trials of my pride that it was so. But if Mary Fortescue were, as she seemed to imply, suffering, in a way, from isolation such as mine had been, I could lighten her lot perhaps, and find a friend as well. I came to the point without more ado.

"Are you not happy here?"

I looked at her as I asked the question. She would not suspect that I could see, and she did not even meet the gaze of the eyes that she thought blind. She turned half away from me, and plucked a bud from a tall rose-bush, as she answered with a very sad little smile:

"Not very," she said.

It sounded so sad, the way in which she said it.

"Are they not kind to you?" I asked.

"No," she said dreamily; then, quickly correcting herself: "Oh yes, they are—very. I owe everything to them—home, and friends, and all I have."

"Have you many friends, Miss Fortescue?"

"No. They are my only friends."

"They are relations, are they not?" I asked.

I was curious to find out, if possible, why she lived here, as she was evidently not an object of much affection to her imperious cousin, at least.

"Yes," she answered, "Mr. Beaufoy is my uncle, and he is my guardian, too. I have no one but them," she added, in a choked voice.

By "them," I understood her uncle and her cousin. Strictly it ought to have meant the dual character of the hard Beaufoy.

We went wandering on down the shaded garden paths, gathering flowers as we went; Mary gathering them, rather, and I carrying at least a share of the garden treasures. We talked on, my companion losing all traces of the shyness which had seemed so natural to her before; but keeping always the divine reserve and sweet dignity which my fancy already exacted from her as her due. Had she been much less calculated to gild the refined gold of a splendid September afternoon, I should have found her fascinating, no doubt, released at last from the galling thraldom of darkness. But I had come, as it were, straight out

of the cheerless chill of a frosty February into "the mid might and flourish of May." From a pitying, tea-meeting chastened sympathy zone of large-bonneted, non-human femininity, into the wholesome splendour of a lovable young life, clouded indeed with grief, but essentially as bright and as beautiful as a hawthorn-crowned morning of May.

I learned, as we threaded the musky alleys, something of her life and her sorrows. The tale was told in fragments, interrupted, as we grew more intimate, by the requirements of her flower-gathering quest, and constantly fulfilled by the delicate and tender care she extended to my supposed blindness. I felt guilty when she guided me with word and touch, and my remorse at the deceit was changed continuously into devotion to its sweet victim.

She told me she was an orphan. I gathered that she had been brought up in wealth, and that her youth had been surrounded with love. It appeared that on her mother's death she had somehow, through some legal complications, which she explained with more than womanly vagueness and unintelligibility, been deprived of all her fortune, and that she was now dependent upon her uncle, Mr. Beaufoy, for her means of existence.

"That is no reason why Miss Beaufoy should treat you like a naughty child," I observed at last, smiling a little. The griefs that befall people through that most potent of all

tyrants, a sensitive disposition, seldom appeal to the sympathies of those who are not subject to the same pressure. There was a charm and a power about Mary Fortescue, even when recounting her sorrows, which made the evil influence of any nineteenth-century fellow-woman appear ridiculous —to me.

"It is wicked of me to complain like this," she said, changing her serious tone, "especially to you," with great compassion; "you must think my griefs very small."

"I would do anything I could to lighten any one of them," I said fervently. "You say you are lonely here, and, I fear, friendless. Will you have a friend, even though he be a blind one?"

"I am sure you are my friend," she said very firmly,

"You can evidently read character," I answered. "I hope I shall be able to prove it, if only by teaching you music well."

"I stooped and plucked a scented geranium.

"Will you take this as a token of friendship?"

She laughed with some astonishment.

"How could you find it?" she asked.

"Instinct," I said, looking into her eyes. They were deep, beautiful blue eyes. "We have some gifts to make up for the loss of sight. Will you accept it?"

"Oh, indeed I will," said she, with a delightful smile.

At this moment a cloud obscured the sun, and from

behind a thick-leaved lilac Giulia Beaufoy appeared. Mary seemed to shrink up.

"You have been an age getting those flowers," she said. "Mr. Coplestone, you had really better be beginning your duties."

CHAPTER IX.

ON THE WATCH.

I WAS not sorry to take Miss Beaufoy's hint as to betaking myself to my duties; there was a very considerable pleasure in them, independent of the personal charm of my pupil.

In a very short time we had settled down into a quiet routine of life, wherein we might have been living for years instead of for a few days only, so evenly and, to outward seeming, so calmly did our existence proceed at Hanover Lodge.

One of my first cares was to dispense as far as possible with the attendance of Hardy. I found that he was only meant to act as a temporary guardian, but I would in any case have soon learnt my way about the house quite well enough to dispense with any special care. And under the new circumstances his attentions were less desirable than ever. Finding me very apt at taking care of myself, he very soon reduced his attendance on me to a minimum, to our mutual satisfaction.

Mr. Beaufoy was rarely seen. He appeared at dinner, and came into the drawing-room for a short time afterwards.

He did not contribute much to the conversation, but talked on general topics with me, as much as politeness required. His demeanour towards Miss Beaufoy was rather deferential, and to Mary constrained and rather patronising. It was a most curious exercise of the memory and of the imagination to contrast the formal and altogether uninteresting paterfamilias, presented in general by my host and employer, with the passion and fury of the white-faced man who, for some mysterious reason, was about to shoot me the morning I had heedlessly strayed into his sanctum.

That scene was photographed on my mind, not the less distinctly because it had been so brief. The fact involved itself in my imagination with the fate of Mary Fortescue. I could not tell how. I only felt that she was not really one of them, any more than I was. There was a close alliance and understanding between the father and the daughter, and there was some extraordinary secret also shared between them. I found it difficult to believe that Mary would be kept in the house out of mere philanthropy, and, on the face of it, concluded that she might be in want of a friend on the spot. I was very willing to look upon myself as that friend providentially sent to her aid.

I noticed very soon that Hardy, as well as Miss Beaufoy seemed to have the *entrée* to the forbidden apartments.

Miss Beaufoy had not mentioned the fact to me when explaining how her father disliked any intrusion. But it struck me as more than odd, that a philosopher, whose zeal for research led him to point a revolver at a blind man who had intruded upon his privacy, should apparently give the run of his laboratory to a rough specimen of humanity like Hardy. To be sure, the Hardy family might have claims to be considered on a confidential footing, for Mrs. Hardy was the cook of the household, and the only other female servant was a cousin of hers. So I learnt casually from Miss Fortescue.

While I spent a few quiet and really pleasant days in my new home, I could not get the idea of these coincidences out of my head, and they took at last the form of a very decided desire and determination to investigate the mystery a little on my own account. There was the more reason for this, as I had a considerable amount of time quite at my own disposal, some of which I devoted to a survey of the premises.

I found that Mr. Beaufoy's rooms did not look out into the large garden, but that a high wall, enclosing a quadrangular space, environed that part of the house in which they were situated. There was a small door in this wall, by which, as I seldom saw Mr. Beaufoy coming in or out of the hall-door, I judged that he generally let himself in or out.

Except for this, which in itself was little enough, and for the fact that the door at the end of the lobby, which had on that one occasion given me admittance to the forbidden precincts, was invariably shut and locked when anyone emerged from it in my hearing, there was nothing whatever about Hanover Lodge to lend itself to ideas of mystery or crime.

The house was large, modern, and comfortable. The living was excellent but unpretentious. My own room was a very nice one, up in a tower at one angle of the front, which tower was well covered with ivy, and gave already a picturesque aspect to a house which, but for its aid, would have been like a great deal of the earlier revival of picturesque red-brick building—very red, and far from picturesque.

As I have said, I made it my task to wean Hardy from a too assiduous devotion to me. He seemed rather to take to me in consequence—in a grim, gruff way, certainly; still, he indulged in a hard jest or two now and then, and while willingly humouring my fancy, when he found I could get about with safety, he yet took a kind of pleasure in laying any slight mishap to the score of my self-confidence. I had no trust whatever in the man, and no abatement of my first dislike, so I took good care not to rouse any suspicions in his mind that I was otherwise than what I seemed, for if there was any wickedness about, I

felt pretty sure that Mr. Hardy was well to the fore in its commission.

One afternoon, about a week after my arrival, Mr. Beaufoy had announced his intention of going to town, and had undertaken to execute some trifling commissions for the ladies.

I was sitting alone in the sunshine, on a garden-chair by the window, when in the stillness I heard the lock of the lobby-door turned, and the sound of the door opening. My curiosity took a sudden leap to life. I went in through the French-window, crossed the room, the door of which was open and proceeded quietly to the end of the lobby. Yes, sure enough, once more the door stood open. I could not resist the temptation to explore. I reached the door and saw again the room into which I had previously penetrated. I entered and looked round. There was really nothing visible to suggest any reason for Mr. Beaufoy's emotion at my appearance. But the little room beyond! Where was it? I had certainly seen him at the entrance of an inner room. Where was that inner room?

Had the whole of that vividly-remembered scene been nothing but an effort of excited and disordered imagination? Had my newly-opened eyes played me false? It was highly probable, and, in a sudden revulsion of feeling, I realised how greatly all my mental attitude had been

affected by the imagined scene. I felt supremely foolish and considerably ashamed. Crestfallen and guilty, I was about to retrace my steps, hoping I might escape unobserved, when my attention was caught by something odd in the appearance of a bookcase in the wall opposite to me. Part of the shelves seemed to slope out a little from the line. I went close up to examine it. This at least was no trick of eyesight. There was a projection of a couple of inches in the midst of the large bookcase. I touched it. There was no trace of leather binding nor of oaken shelf in the metallic cold that struck my hand. The book-case was of iron. I pulled at it. It swung heavily but easily open, like the door of a big safe, and there was the very inner room. In a moment I was inside. There was the furnace, not glowing now as on a former occasion, but cold. Various philosophical-looking instruments and apparatus were ranged round, and on a table were piles of yellow metal, and in a half-open safe more and yet more. Ere I could formulate a thought, I heard a step and the outer door closed. I stepped out just in time, closing the iron door gingerly, and met Hardy.

"Where have I got to? Is that Hardy?" I asked.

I was not at all sure that he might not also produce a revolver, and there was no cool-headed Basilisk to save me now. But no. Hardy burst out laughing.

"You've got yourself into a mess," he said in his

laughter. "What, you have lost yourself now, have you?"

I affected anger.

"Perhaps you'll tell me where I am?" I said.

"You've got into master's study. Here, this way," he said. "Master don't care about having people in his room."

"Well, the door was open," I said. "I don't profess to find my way where I have never learnt it."

"All right, sir," said Hardy rather humbly; "I left the door open a minute. You needn't mention it to master."

"Certainly not," I said; "it's nothing me." And when he left me on the garden-chair I breathed freely, for I saw that this second adventure would not come to Mr. Beaufoy's ears from the trusty Hardy, at any rate.

Resting after the excitement of this adventure, I tried but in vain to draw some clear conclusion from what I had witnessed. Those piles of shining metal; the safe filled with a similar gleaming hoard! The scientific apparatus, and the jealous guard kept over those precincts!

For a moment the old stories of the alchemists came into my mind, and then suddenly a strange suspicion flashed upon me. Could it be?—but hush! I kept the suspicion locked in my inmost heart. Only I resolved to watch—always to watch.

CHAPTER X.

A NEW ARRIVAL.

No! Whatever it was, I was safe from Hardy. His manner showed plainly enough that he stood in considerable awe of Mr. Beaufoy, and that his having left the door of the secret room unguarded was much more of a care to his mind than the very vague possibility that I might have discovered anything of a compromising nature.

As I sat on the garden-seat, and revolved, composedly enough, what I had seen, I heard a heavy step crunching on the gravel. I turned my head and beheld Hardy. He had a rather anxious look on his face, and stopped beside me evidently wishing to have some conversation. I was about to put some question by way of identifying the bystander, when he took the lead out of my hands.

"Nice and warm here in the sun, sir," he said.

A very ordinary remark for anyone to make by way of starting a little conversation, or even as a passing civility. But it was not Hardy's wont to indulge in stray civilities, and there was an unusual touch of deference in his voice, which aroused my interest. There are certain rough

natures of the meaner sort, who show at once in their voices when they wish to conciliate. The humility which they assume is as offensive as the presumption of their ruling hours. And Mr. Hardy's wheedling tone set me more against him than any of his previous roughness had done. It was evidently the politeness begotten of fear, and I felt a stronger dislike to the man than ever; still, his remark demanded a civil answer, and we got into a sort of conversation.

"You have a pretty light time of it here, I suppose Hardy?" I observed.

"Pretty well, sir; there's plenty to do sometimes."

"Mr. Beaufoy spends a lot of his time in the house? Are you anything of a chemist, Hardy?"

"Me? No, sir," said Hardy quickly.

"I am, a little," I said; "at least, I used to be. Mr. Beaufoy has a laboratory, I am told?"

Hardy looked very uncomfortable.

"Master's very particular about no one getting into his rooms——" he began.

"But I could not possibly do any harm. I might tell him that even when I got in there by accident, through the door being left open——"

"Look here, sir," Hardy broke in very earnestly, "that door oughtn't to have been left open. And what I wanted to ask you was that you would be so good as to say nothing about it. It don't make no difference," he added with a

grin, "but master's a wonder for having his orders obeyed, and Miss Beaufoy, she's wuss."

"Well, Hardy," said I slowly, "I don't know that I ought to put myself on the side of slackness, and you are now deliberately asking me to screen your fault. It is nothing to me, certainly, one way or the other, but I will say nothing about it, on condition that you keep out of my way, and interfere with me as little as possible."

"All right, sir," said he, dropping magically from his respectful and even cringing tone, directly he found he had obtained the assurance he requested. It occurred to me, very strongly, that having almost committed myself to a course of investigation which might be anything but safe, even the most partial alliance of such a man as Hardy, under the influence of nothing but fear, might have its value, and would certainly be better than nothing at all, so I checked his confident tone by saying significantly:

"It rests with you whether I forget it or not."

As I said this, and as Hardy, with a still more familiar but this time confidential "All right, sir," moved off to the back premises, the figures of the two ladies came in sight from the shaded drive, and moved slowly across the lawn. I had much to do to restrain myself from advancing to meet them, or rather one of them, for Mary Fortescue was the only portion of wholesome and straightforward

humanity about the place. But I waited until their voices sounded, and then rose and went towards them. Whereupon they quickened their steps and met me, talking upon indifferent topics.

In the most melodramatic circumstances, as in the most humdrum, in the presence of tragedies, domestic or national, as in the times when every man is living at peace under his own vine and under his own fig-tree, I imagine that the ordinary observances of domestic life and the ordinary canons of household decorum are regarded. When people are shaken out of their ordinary ways at home, they realise that strange things are come upon them. But the battle that decides the fate of an empire, or the constitutional quarrel of centuries, will leave less impression on a household within sound of the firing, than the mistake in the peaceful hunting-field, or the gun accident which turns the profound contentment of autumn into a voiceless despair.

So, however strange the surroundings at Hanover Lodge, however irreconcilable with life in its straightforward aspects, as hitherto known to me, and whatever might be the secret thoughts of our hearts toward the outside world, or towards one another, the general course of life, was, outwardly, very much that of hundreds of similar households within a radius of not many miles. We strolled round the garden pleasantly enough, for Miss Beaufoy, was

in one of her best moods, and Mary Fortescue was much more cheerful and at ease than she generally seemed to be in the company of her cousin.

"It seems as if the summer would never end," I said, inspired by the splendid vigour of sunshine, which still made the days quite hot.

"It won't be half so dull in the winter, now," said Mary artlessly. "We can get through a lot of music in the long evenings."

As we discussed musical schemes for the winter, Hardy's grim companion from the lodge appeared with a telegram in his hand.

"For Mr. Beaufoy," he said, rather out of breath. They evidently did not admit telegraph-messengers any more than cabs within the grounds of Hanover Lodge.

"Give it to me," said Miss Beaufoy.

He handed it to her, and looked to see if he should wait.

"Go," she said; and he went, as if glad to get away. Her manners were not pleasant towards her dependants.

She stood still and opened the envelope. Mary Fortescue and I went on a little. Then I turned and looked back, in time to see a shade, or rather a pallor cross her face. Then she smiled.

"Mary, this is a nice surprise. Who do you think is coming?"

Mary evidently had some definite idea, and that not a pleasant one, for she looked at her cousin with frightened and rather pleading eyes.

"Professor Plöwitz will be here this evening," said the Basilisk, with a laugh, which was among her most unpleasant efforts.

Mary flushed, and then shrank away towards me.

"I am not at all glad to hear it," she said; "but it is nothing to me."

"My dear Mary, you mustn't let Herr Plöwitz hear that sort of thing. It would vex him deeply."

Mary Fortescue showed that in spite of her calm and generally subdued manner there were possibilities of resistance, and even of assertion in her. She looked very angry, and very dignified.

"I beg you will not speak of him to me in that way," she said, and went into the house.

"Come," said Miss Beaufoy, "I will play to you in the drawing-room."

Whenever she had vexed her cousin, she became gracious and pleasant to me. Having a close game to play, I smothered my feelings and went into the house.

"Who is Herr Plöwitz?" I asked carelessly.

A spiteful gleam shone in the Basilisk's eyes.

"He is a friend of my father's, and a great admirer of Mary's."

Then she went on playing in her favourite manner, talking, charmingly enough, through the music.

Suddenly the door was hurriedly opened. and Mr. Beaufoy, looking agitated and flurried, stood on the threshold with a newspaper in his hand.

"I want to speak to you, Giulia," he said.

"Very well, papa," she said, playing slowing, and making no sign of moving.

"Here is something that will interest you," he said in a tone of affected composure.

I watched his face. It was full of warning and anxiety. Their eyes met. He looked at me. She nodded re-assuringly.

"Here is the account of the marriage of your cousin Henriette," he said. "Read that."

He handed her an *Evening Standard*, folded small, and pointed to a paragraph with a large heading. As she read, he watched her with very anxious eyes, which wandered uneasily to me.

"Very interesting," she replied calmly, putting the paper down on the piano. "And I have something to show you. Here is a telegram from Professor Plöwitz."

"From Plöwitz himself!" He seized the telegram with feverish haste.

The contrast between voice and manner was suddenly lost.

The Basilisk lifted a warning finger, and he glanced at me and checked himself.

"From Dover, you see," she said calmly.

A look of intense relief passed over his face.

"That's all right," he said. "He will be here by dinner-time."

And so he left the room.

Miss Beaufoy made a slight and gracious apology to me for leaving me so suddenly, and followed her father.

The paper lay on the piano. There was the paragraph staring me in the face. I drew the paper towards me, and, playing softly, leant forward, and read:

"Extensive seizure of counterfeit coin in Germany."

It appeared from the report that a number of very ingeniously-made counterfeit coins, with a large percentage of gold in their composition, had been put in circulation, and that the day before, acting on a clue, the police had searched the lodgings of a Polish student, and discovered a large number of counterfeit twenty-mark pieces. Some papers still smouldering spoke of hurriedly-burnt correspondence, and the hasty flight of the occupant of the room was testified by the fact that no luggage had apparently been taken, though the most scrutinising search of the police failed to bring to light any papers or clue to the man's connections.

Shortly before dinner, just as I was going to dress, I was

surprised to hear the sound of wheels outside. A cab drew up at the door. As I crossed the hall to go up to my room, there stood in the full light of the hall-lamp a man closely muffled, but showing, distinctly enough, long grey hair and a grey beard. He was just being greeted by Mr. Beaufoy. On seeing me he suddenly drew his cloak over his face; but on Mr. Beaufoy whispering something to him he dropped his arm, and looked at me with a smile. No one was in the hall except these two.

Dinner was a little late, and we waited in the drawing-room for the appearance of the visitor.

At last he entered. Mr. Beaufoy preceded him, and gave a sort of general introduction.

"Professor Plówitz."

The ladies greeted him as a former acquaintance.

"Mr. Coplestone, a distinguished musician, also," said Mr. Beaufoy.

I bowed and looked at the man before me. He was young, with short black hair and small black moustache. Who was the man with the grey hair and the long beard? This verily was a puzzling question.

CHAPTER XI.

DR. PLÖWITZ.

I HAD, and have, a prejudice against the holders of vague titles, especially when they do not suit the titles they hold. Pseudo-military men are bad enough, though there are many ways in which very unsoldierly persons may acquire a literal right to the rank which Doll Tearsheet so justly, if rudely, begrudged to Ancient Pistol. The title of doctor, when assumed by men, especially foreigners, with nothing grave or reverend about them, was always a particular passport to my suspicion and dislike, so when during dinner I heard Plöwitz generally spoken to, and of, as Dr. Plöwitz, I was less disposed than ever to take a friendly or even a fair view of the visitor. "Professor" was bad enough, to my thinking, when applied to a man of such juvenile and unphilosophical aspect; but "doctor" was too much for me, and I resolved that Plöwitz was an impostor.

The conversation during dinner certainly showed him in a favourable light. He spoke English perfectly, with a peculiarity of accent which might easily pass for a personal

and not a national one. I have heard many Englishmen with more pronounced departures from the standard of pure speech than Plöwitz was guilty of. The introduction of this new member to the circle had the happiest results on all. Mr. Beaufoy, who generally left his daughter virtually to be both host and hostess, cast off his usual reserve, and talked well; Miss Beaufoy apparently laid herself out to be charming, and, as I very well knew, she could when she chose, succeeded thoroughly. I was not allowed for a moment to feel myself in any sense a stranger, and I availed myself of the opportunity of general and spirited conversation very readily. Plöwitz was both genial and amusing, and assumed the position of an old friend with considerable charm of manner. There was only one who did not brighten up as the rest of us did, and that one was Mary Fortescue. With me she was at first unusually merry and bright; but as, during dinner, Plöwitz directed more of his conversation to her, and, in talking over trivial incidents of previous visits, endeavoured always to associate her with these reminiscences, she very soon drew back into her old state of reserve, and seemed determined to sacrifice all share in the general interest rather than to admit Dr. Plöwitz to the footing of kindly intimacy which he appeared to consider his due. The change was striking. I attempted to carry on some subject on which she had been speaking cheerfully and

pointedly a few minutes before, but she had, as it were, curled up, and answered only with schoolgirl constraint, while to Pölwitz she simply became monosyllabic. I observed a faint and scornful smile flit over the calm face of Miss Beaufoy; while Plöwitz, showing no consciousness of her chilling manner, launched into a very admirably-told story of a student scrape at the University. As he did so, I could not help looking very fixedly at Mary Fortescue. She did not know I could see her, but she blushed deeply.

After dinner we sat for some time talking over our wine. This was a change, as, when alone, Mr. Beaufoy usually left me very soon to my own devices. Plöwitz showed a disposition to be friendly.

"You are a musician, Mr. Coplestone?" he said.

"Yes," I answered. "And you are also, I believe?"

"Oh, not much," he said, laughing modestly.

"A German professor of music," I said, "is generally thought a good deal of in England."

Mr. Beaufoy laughed a little—a rare thing with him.

"Dr. Plöwitz is a professor of metallurgy and mineralogy, not of music, but he is an excellent musician as well."

"Yes," said the professor. "I am interested in the experiments that Mr. Beaufoy makes. We have worked

together before, and," turning to Beaufoy, "I am going to ask him to let me help him again."

The two men smiled at one another, and Plöwitz emptied his glass, as if drinking an unspoken toast.

"Do you take any interest in scientific matters, Mr. Coplestone?" he continued.

"No. I have not had any opportunity for some years of taking up anything, and all my energies were formerly given to music."

When we joined the ladies in the drawing-room, Plöwitz proved himself the possessor of a really fine voice. Miss Beaufoy played for him, and I endeavoured, from curiosity, to gather what Mary Fortescue really thought of him. She sat apart out of the bright light of the lamps. I made my way over to her.

"Is there room for me here?"

She made room, and I sat beside her.

"Dr. Plöwitz is an old friend?" I asked.

"He has been here several times before."

"He sings remarkably well," I went on.

"I suppose he learned abroad," she said, as if, though she could not deny that he was a fine singer, the fact that his accomplishment was not of English growth deprived either him or it of all credit. This was one of the most woman-like things I had yet heard her say, and it gave me a great deal of amused pleasure.

"He has been telling some very amusing stories of his student days," I observed. "What wonderfully good English he speaks."

I was able to observe her easily in the shaded light, without making my observation too marked. She looked anxious while I spoke of him.

He turned directly towards us now, and sang a passionate serenade straight at our corner. She grew very uneasy, and moved her head, as if to escape from the spell of his voice, and as he sang more passionately, she turned and looked at me, and there were tears in her eyes.

Why I should have felt chilled and angry I do not know. I rose and moved across the room, coming between them as I went.

The song was ended. He whispered a word to Miss Beaufoy, who glanced over her beautiful shoulder, and slowly nodded, as she finished the accompaniment.

"Now, Mr. Coplestone," she said in her most winning tones, "come and play for me."

I took my place at the piano, and saw Plöwitz ambling across to where I had left Mary with tears of emotion in her eyes.

Miss Beaufoy sang two or three songs, and at the end of one Plöwitz offered his congratulations to us both, standing close by. I started, having imagined him quite at the other end of the room. Miss Beaufoy looked round.

"Why, where is Mary?" she asked, with a touch of malicious merriment in her voice.

"Miss Fortescue did not seem to care for the music," he answered with a certain significance, and the two looked straight into each other's eyes.

A few days passed, uneventfully enough, though they were full of a strange interest to me, watching with growing interest the relations between Plöwitz and Mary Fortescue.

The professor spent much of his time with Mr. Beaufoy, but we always met at dinner, and spent some time together afterwards.

On these occasions, Plöwitz made evident efforts to overcome Mary's reserve, and I noticed, after a little while, that though, when left apart with the doctor, she was exceedingly quiet and distant, and took an early opportunity of joining Miss Beaufoy and myself, yet when relieved from the burden of a *tête-à-tête* she was more spirited and conversational than usual. Perplexed as I was by her demeanour, I was becoming more perplexed by my own interest in the affair. For all his civility—and, to do him justice, Plöwitz was not only civil, he was exceedingly charming—I had no liking for the man. He had come to the house, I could have sworn, disguised. I had grave and dangerous suspicions of the reasons. Yet I could not arrogate to myself a right to interfere in his love-

affairs, still less in Mary Fortescue's. Putting it in that light had a bracing effect on my resolve. I was determined at least to watch the opportunity to do what I could for her interests.

There was very evidently some sort of understanding between Miss Beaufoy and Plöwitz, and about Mary Fortescue, and no understanding about her, in which Miss Beaufoy had a part, could, I felt sure, be for her good.

Plöwitz preserved his calm and pleasant demeanour under all the pretty obvious checks to which he was subjected. To be sure he did not know that I was cognisant of them and the sympathies of Miss Beaufoy were so obviously with, him that she seemed more of an accomplice than a friend. But after a little while I detected something of pique and anxiety at times in his manner, and Mr. Beaufoy also showed signs of being annoyed and anxious.

As I sat one morning in the garden-chair, Plöwitz, Mr. Beaufoy, and his daughter were walking on the lawn in earnest colloquy. Presently Plöwitz left them, and the father and daughter continued their conversation. They walked towards the house talking earnestly, and passed close by me without taking the slightest notice of my presence.

"You must talk to her," said Mr. Beaufoy in his curtest tones. "She must consent. It is our only chance."

"She is very obstinate on some points," replied the Basilisk, "but I think I can manage her."

"You *must* manage her," said Beaufoy. "You know everything depends on it."

"I will talk to her," said Giulia.

This seemed to me to threaten a good deal; and they went into the house.

Mary Fortescue did not appear at luncheon that day. She had a headache, Miss Beaufoy said.

Plöwitz looked significantly at her. She answered his look by saying with emphasis:

"She will be well soon. It won't last."

Her absence seemed to remove a wholesome restraint from the visitor, and he appeared to much less advantage than I had ever seen him before.

"Will you walk with us this afternoon, Mr. Coplestone?" asked Miss Beaufoy towards the end of lunch.

"With very great pleasure," I said.

"But," interposed Plöwitz, "Miss Fortescue will not be well enough."

"Oh yes, she will. A walk will do her head good."

In about an hour's time we were in the drawing-room ready to start

"Ah," said Plöwitz anxiously, "Miss Fortescue will not come." But as he spoke she entered the room. She looked rather pale, and I thought I saw some traces of

tears, but she seemed very cheerful; but as Miss Beaufoy kept me chiefly by her side, I was obliged to watch her cousin from a distance. Miss Beaufoy evidently separated us from the others on purpose, and I could not alter the arrangement, even if I had desired to. But Mary Fortescue appeared to be perfectly happy, and when we got home again Plöwitz looked like a new man, triumph was in his face, as we all strolled together up to the door, and his look was reflected in a colder and more cynical form by Miss Beaufoy as she met his eye.

If nothing else resulted from this walk, it at least showed me the state of my own feelings. Strange and dismal was the revelation at such a time that my interest in Mary Fortescue was far deeper, far tenderer, than I had allowed myself to imagine. But the contradiction of my views, the sight of her happiness, and, most of all, the triumph in a rival's face, showed me that I had only been calm while I saw no chance of another becoming to her what I had not ventured to put into clear thought for myself.

In the pleasant before-dinner hour, we were gathered in the twilight in the drawing-room. Mary greeted me and called me to her side as I came in with what sounded to me almost like an appeal for help, and I saw, though she did not know it, a look which was more the look of a hunted animal, than of a woman who was happy in her love.

We talked quietly and happily as we had often talked before. Plöwitz came up and tried to join us. I was prepared to yield my place, but something in Mary's face and manner kept me by her side, and presently Plöwitz left us, with a certain haughtiness, which was meant for Mary, evidently ; but we talked on pleasantly.

As I was going up to dress, Miss Beaufoy passed me at the door, and we stood in the hall a minute.

"Don't you know, Mr. Coplestone," she said, "what people who are in love think of those who prevent them talking together?"

"What do you mean?" I asked,

"You put yourself in that position just now, and kept it with an obstinacy which does credit to your tact. I only tell you as a friend." And she swept upstairs, laughing.

This was a blow to my vanity. I turned back on the impulse of the moment, and saw Mary Fortescue kneeling in front of the fire. She was alone.

"Miss Fortescue?" I cried.

"Yes," she said very sweetly.

"Forgive me asking you. I fear I was very dense just now, when I hear you were anxious to continue your talk with Herr Plöwitz."

Her eyes opened widely.

"What do you mean?" she asked in a tone of something like horror.

"Miss Beaufoy just told me so."

She looked still more horrified.

"Forgive me if I stretch the privilege of a friend. Is it true that you do not like Professor Plöwitz?"

On one point, at least, my doubts were set at rest for ever. There was no sort of anger at a question I had no earthly right to ask, but with a thrill of intense meaning in her voice, and looking with flashing eyes full into my face, she answered simply:

"I hate him!"

CHAPTER XII.

MORE MYSTERY.—SHORT, BUT TO THE POINT.

WHEN Mary Fortescue had said the words, "I hate him!" she rose from her kneeling position, and, with almost tragic grace, left me, without uttering another word. She did not know that I read in her eyes what was repeated in the tone of her voice—the utter loathing which she felt for this man Plöwitz. "Was it fair to keep back from her the secret of my restoration of sight?" I asked myself. "Was it just to take advantage of her ignorance in order that I might the more easily gaze upon the workings of that beautiful face?" A thousand times no! I would follow her and tell her all, trusting to her good judgment, if not to her forbearance, as to whether the Beaufoys should also be made aware of the false pretences under which I was living at Hanover Lodge. As I advanced towards the foot of the staircase I met Plöwitz coming down. My good resolutions vanished like snow before the sun. Some still small voice (perhaps not conscience) whispered to me, "Stop! you are in the presence of an enemy. All is fair in love and war. Keep your secret." We all of us have a pre-

sentiment of evil; do any of us have a presentiment of good *from* evil? I think I had.

We stopped simultaneously. Remember, I could see, and he did not know it. He was the first to speak.

"Mr. Coplestone," he said, "I have a favour to ask of you."

When I was a boy at school we had a common, but not classic, expression called "sucking up to a fellow," which meant that the boy "sucking up" had a desire to obtain some favour from the boy "sucked up" to. On the present occasion the way in which Dr. Plöwitz addressed me made me fully aware that he was "sucking up" to me. Not only was the tone of his voice almost musical in its sweetness, but, despite my presumptive blindness, his lips were wreathed in the most fascinating of smiles. I mistrusted him on the spot. His manner was altogether too honeyed. I resolved to be wary.

"A favour, doctor?" I answered. "What favour can I possibly confer on you?"

"Sit down," he said, "and I will tell you. After all, it is not a great matter," he added lightly, as he drew his chair beside mine. "I want," he continued, "to talk to you about Miss Fortescue."

If I had not known that the man was watching me intently, I should have jumped up from my seat. As it was, I repressed my emotion, and with assumed gravity asked, "And what about Miss Fortescue?"

His next question was one of startling abruptness.

"Do you think that she is perfectly sane?"

"Sane?" I echoed with astonishment.

"Sane," he repeated calmly. "Now, my dear fellow," he went on, laying his hand with affectionate familiarity on my shoulder, "believe me that I ask from a good motive. You, as her musical instructor, must have every opportunity of gauging the quality of her mental character. Have you ever detected any symptom of aberration of intellect in her conduct?"

"Never," I replied firmly, "never. On the contrary, I should say that Miss Fortescue was particularly gifted with understanding."

"And *I* should not," said a woman's voice behind me.

I started to my feet. The speaker was Miss Beaufoy.

"And *I* should not," she repeated, flashing her eyes upon me as though they could pierce me through and through.

"Why not?" I stammered,

Plöwitz took up the thread.

"That is precisely what we want to tell you about," he said softly. "Am I privileged to speak?" he asked, turning to the Basilisk.

She merely bowed her head, still keeping her eyes steadily fixed on me.

"Thank you," said Plöwitz. "As an old friend of the family it gives me great pain to question the state of Miss

Fortescue's mind, but I am constrained to do so in the interests of——" Here he paused.

"Of us all," put in Miss Beaufoy, with a contemptuous smile on her fine mouth.

"Of us all," repeated the German. "The reason we have for believing Miss Fortescue to be more or less out of her mind is this (I speak on behalf of the highly-respected Beaufoy family): Miss Fortescue asserts that she hears strange voices in the night; Miss Fortescue states that she has seen strange men in this highly-respectable household. Miss Fortescue goes further, and declares that she has seen our adorable friend, Miss Beaufoy, in strange disguises, more suited to the ladies of the stage than to a well-known benefactress of the poor. All this is very distressing to worthy Mr. Beaufoy, to his still worthier daughter, and—may I add?—to me."

"It is extremely absurd," said the Basilisk. "Has she said nothing to you, Mr. Coplestone, of these matters?"

"Not a word," I answered mechanically.

"Not a word?"

Plöwitz and Miss Beaufoy exchanged glances.

"Then," said the doctor, "all I can say is, watch her."

"Be on your guard," chimed in the Basilisk, "and don't listen to her silly stories; they are too ridiculous—much too ridiculous."

Both she and Plöwitz laughed heartily. But what was

in their laughter was not in their eyes. *If mine told me true, they were relieved of a great fear.*

"Of course," said Miss Beaufoy, "what we have told you is in the strictest confidence."

"An English gentleman," purred Plöwitz, "does not need to be reminded of that."

I could not help retorting:

"Nor a German one either."

"Good!" said Plöwitz, rubbing his hands. "Good!" After the French, you are the readiest people under the sun—I mean under the fog. Good—good again!"

I could have kicked the man, but my mind was too full of conflicting ideas to resent his impertinence. Nevertheless, my face must have betrayed my feelings, for Miss Beaufoy said quickly:

"You mustn't mind Dr. Plöwitz, Mr. Coplestone. He is privileged here."

"Of course," laughed Plöwitz; "of course. So I ought to be."

"Perhaps I should add something to what we have said," said the Basilisk. "Have I your permission?" she asked Plöwitz.

"By all means," he replied gaily, again making use of the invisible soap; "by all means."

"You must know, then," continued Miss Beaufoy, without a symptom of interest, without a shade of tone,

"that Dr. Plöwitz is the affianced husband of Mary Fortescue."

I could not speak. There was a dull weight on my brain, which seemed to tie my tongue by sheer force of pressure. What manner of man was this, trying to prove his future wife mad? What manner of woman was this ready to wed a man whom she hated? My heart was as heavy as my head.

"You seem surprised," said Miss Beaufoy coldly; "but the match has been arranged for years. Now you understand why these strange fancies of Mary make Dr. Plöwitz so sad."

"So very sad," echoed Plöwitz mournfully; but, as I could see, with a hyæna-like expression on his countenance.

"I *can* understand it," I said, trying to be calm.

At that moment the dinner-gong sounded through the hall.

"We shall be too late to dress," cried Miss Beaufoy. "I wonder where papa is."

"Shall I call him?" asked Plöwitz, with a significant glance.

She nodded.

He raised a small tube, which hung by the side of the mantelpiece, to his lips, and blew softly. Then he shouted aloud:

"Mr. Beaufoy! Mr. Beaufoy! dinner is ready!"

But while he was shouting, *I saw the top of the staircase double backwards, leaving a chasm, out of which Mr. Beaufoy walked as easily as he would have done, from a doorway!*

As the stairs noiselessly resumed their ordinary position and appearance, he descended them with a good deal of noise.

"Ah, my good friends," he said, as he reached us, "I'm quite ready for dinner. I've been hard at work. Come, Mr. Coplestone, lead the way into the dining-room. Even you ought to know it by this time."

I went on ahead like a man in a dream; but not so much in front but that I could hear Plöwitz say, in reply to a whispered remonstrance of Beaufoy's:

"Pooh, poch! it was an excellent joke. The blind man couldn't see, and it even frightened *you*. Old friend, I like jokes."

We sat down.

"Mary is too unwell to come down," said Mr. Beaufoy. "Poor girl!"

The Basilisk and the doctor saluted one another with smiles.

CHAPTER XIII.

IS SHE JEALOUS ?

THE conversation at dinner on this eventful evening was again delightful. Plöwitz was charming. All my suspicion and dislike, intensified now by a bitter and grudging jealousy, remained in full force. Yet I was obliged to be interested and amused in spite of myself.

Under the influence of the versatile German, Mr. Beaufoy showed himself in a much more sympathetic light than usual, and indulged in a vein of caustic though somewhat pompous humour, which made him much more of an acquisition at his own dinner-table than he generally cared to be. Giulia Beaufoy was in unusually high spirits, and she devoted herself, I could not help thinking, to drawing me out in a rather marked manner. She seemed to have placed me on a footing of secure and confidential intimacy, which was different from her attitude, even at her friendliest moments, during the previous period of my sojourn at Hanover Lodge.

Plöwitz maintained towards me a manner of suave deference, which was not only personally friendly, but en-

dorsed Miss Beaufoy's action in constituting me a trusted depository of the family secrets. Under other circumstances I should have keenly enjoyed this state of affairs. My social light, such as it was, had been so long hidden under a bushel of seclusion and despondency, that the transference to a circle which was, to-night at least, little less than brilliant, to a recognised and trusted position in a friendly household, should have been a strong and abiding delight. But the confidence which was at once a sign and a cause of this advanced intimacy, had for me a twofold horror. While I strove, and apparently with success, to take my part in the tourney of talk, two terrible thoughts were ringing an unending muffled peal in my brain:

"Do you think that she is perfectly sane?" "Dr. Plöwitz is the affianced husband of Mary Fortescue."

And this man at the head of the table—this perfect type of the cultivated, comfortable, commonplace man of business; this sample of the innumerable hosts of merchant-princelings whose daily exodus brings an atmosphere of wealthy repose even to the sordid bustle of a city terminus—this man I had seen, not a quarter of an hour before, emerging, like an evil djinn of modern days, through a mysterious aperture, while the staircase of his house revolved like that of a mediæval stronghold of romance.

What I had seen was so strangely at variance with the character of our dinner-table talk that it required no slight

effort of will to enable me to subdue myself to the exigencies of the occasion.

Somehow I got through the ordeal of dinner, encouraged by the hope of an early retirement afterwards, and a calm review of recent events in the solitude of my room in the tower. But a prolonged trial was in store for me. Dr. Plöwitz would not hear of my leaving them, and Mr. Beaufoy joined his guest in pressing me to remain, with such urgency, that I felt it only prudent, under the circumstances, to avoid any shadow of suspicion, by yielding with all the grace I could assume to their solicitations.

"Mr. Coplestone sets us a good example," said Plöwitz. "It is, perhaps, barbarous to enjoy our wine after the ladies have gone; but Miss Beaufoy will excuse us while she goes to visit her cousin."

"You might, perhaps, have your own affairs to talk about with Mr. Beaufoy," I answered disingenuously.

"My dear Coplestone," said Mr. Beaufoy, with a fine approach to *bonhomie*, "I hope you do not think that we would be so wanting in courtesy. We have not made a stranger of you hitherto."

It might have been fancy, but I thought there was a look of mockery in Plöwitz's eyes as I accepted the situation, which made me long to brain him with a decanter; but caution was burned into my mind.

What I had already seen convinced me that my safety

depended upon my prudence, and a higher and more powerful motive than mere self-preservation counselled extreme circumspection. Whatever might be the nature of the mystery of Hanover Lodge, whatever the character of the compulsion brought to bear upon Mary Fortescue, there could be no doubt that she was unhappy. There were strong grounds for believing that she was in danger. This was enough—more than enough—to impose the utmost caution upon me. It was in my power, if in anyone's, to protect her, and through no folly or forgetfulness of mine should she be deprived of the aid that I alone could be in a position to give her.

When at last we left the table and joined Miss Beaufoy, a further period of enforced general interest was in store for me.

Miss Beaufoy was seated in a low chair beside the hearth, and looked singularly winning and handsome as she saw us entering. I hoped that in some shaded corner I might catch sight of Mary, but I was soon satisfied that she had not come down.

"And how is the invalid now?" asked Plöwitz in an unctuous, purring tone, assuming, evidently, the chief right to take an interest in her.

"She is not well enough to come down to-night," said the Basilisk decidedly.

"I hope it is nothing serious," I said in as unconcerned a tone as I could adopt.

"Nothing at all—a little cold and headache."

As she said this she raised her eyebrows and smiled at Plöwitz, who pursed up his lips and slightly shrugged his shoulders in reply.

I resolved at least to give no clue to my own feelings on the subject, and entered with feigned zest into the music, which detained us for some time. At length Mr. Beaufoy and Dr. Plöwitz withdrew. Miss Beaufoy detained me, as I was about to follow their example.

"You are not very tired, Mr. Coplestone, are you?"

I owned that I was not.

"Would you mind a little more music? I feel so much in the mood for it to-night."

She was in her softest and most caressing mood, as she sang and talked for some time, while, by the irony of circumstances, I was really eager to get away.

She thanked me very graciously at last.

"It is a great privilege to have such a sympathetic musician in the house," she added.

"I am very glad that I am useful again," I answered.

"I did not mean that. You are more than useful. We do not make *use* of our friends."

"I fear my powers of usefulness will disappear while my pupil is ill," I answered, ignoring the flattering tenor and tone of her words.

"You can do more," she said, softly playing as she spoke.

"Mary has her interests already, and, with Dr. Plöwitz here, she has no time to think of other things. To me the time is often heavy enough. You can help it to be much lighter."

It seemed absurd to answer with a conventional assurance that I was glad to be of any service; but I did not see how I could say more.

"Good-night," said Miss Beaufoy, holding my hand. My supposed blindness entitled her, perhaps, to treat me a little patronisingly. "Good-night. While Mary is unwell I will constitute myself your pupil in her place."

And she left me with a luminous look in her eyes, which caused me as much uneasiness as the more frequent light of malevolence which I had observed in them.

CHAPTER XIV.

A PROOF OF INSANITY.

A WEEK went by, and no Mary Fortescue appeared. The daily reports of her health were anything but alarming, yet, as her absence continued, I grew seriously anxious, and imagined that all kinds of pressure were being brought to bear upon her to bend her to the suit of the odious Plöwitz.

He bore her absence with perfect equanimity, and was always gay and entertaining. The proposed transfer of my care as instructor to Miss Beaufoy took effect, inasmuch as she regularly called upon me for lessons. But little instruction was done. In fact I was not competent to teach her. The absence of her cousin had a great effect on her manner. She was soft, and gentle, and fascinating, and it was only by continual remembrance of the other side of her character—of the strange and compromising sights which I had witnessed, of the monstrous aspersion of Mary Fortescue's sanity, and her cruel indifference to the happiness of a defenceless girl—that I was able to steel myself against the temptation of falling into the vein of

almost tenderness which she had adopted, and compromising my future usefulness to the sweet girl whose lot was cast in such hard places. Any pointed reference to Mary always brought out the hateful side of Miss Beaufoy's character. The curt and harsher tone would have shown how distasteful the subject was, but she did not know that I could also see how the rich imperial loveliness of a gracious woman changed into cruel fierceness and scorn at the mention of her cousin's name, especially when one evening I turned to the subject of Mary's supposed mental delusions, and strenuously opposed the idea of her want of intellectual balance. For a whole day Miss Beaufoy relapsed into her coldest vein, and I did not know what harm my advocacy might have caused to the innocent object of my defence.

The tension of the situation was becoming too much for me. I was playing a difficult part—a part of extreme self-repression, and was daily more and more consumed with anxiety as to the welfare of Mary.

At last my doubts and fears were destined to be, in some measure, relieved.

One day, about a week after Mary Fortescue's illness had reduced our party to four, Mr. Beaufoy announced his intention of going to London after luncheon. Miss Beaufoy was to accompany him. She very graciously asked if they could do anything for me. I sincerely wished she would ask me to go with them. The sight of the busy life of the

outside world would just then have been very refreshing. So much did I feel this, that I was on the verge of asking if they would mind my joining them, when the thought of the tax it would be upon me to restrain all signs of eager gratification and curiosity at beholding once more the wonderful pageant of life, checked and withheld me. It would never do to jeopardise my position in this strange household just now.

"You won't come, then, professor?" said Miss Beaufoy, referring evidently to a previous conversation.

"My dear Miss Beaufoy," said Plöwitz, smiling largely, "gallantry and valour should go hand-in-hand. Discretion, as you say, is the better part of valour. Let discretion be the better part of gallantry too if I refuse."

"Our friend Plöwitz," said Beaufoy rather icily, "is, I think, far more distinguished by valour and gallantry than by discretion. Pray do not try to overcome his scruples."

"If you find it dull alone, remember I have warned you!" said Miss Beaufoy.

"I can at least amuse myself in the park," said Plöwitz, "and Mr. Coplestone will perhaps help me to get through the hours of your absence."

There were meaning smiles on their faces which showed significance in their words. What they said might very well have alluded to any little social or domestic mystery, and to such they no doubt thought I should attribute it.

I suddenly felt very glad that I was not to be out of the way that afternoon.

"Giulia will be back early, if I am not," said Mr. Beaufoy. Then, lowering his voice, and glancing quickly at me: "Don't forget discretion."

"Ah," said Plöwitz, throwing out his hands and shrugging his shoulders, "you are a miracle of prudence! And I—I do not believe in miracles."

At last they were gone, and I was enjoying—if enjoying it could be called—a period of solitary and anxious consideration.

I went up the staircase in a perturbed frame of mind. Solid and massive to all appearance, it was hard to believe that I had, a few days before, seen it silently and easily revolve. I returned to the library and pondered on the mysteries by which I was surrounded. Yet, of all the puzzling and agitating surroundings of the situation, the marked friendliness of the Basilisk was, on the whole, the least desirable, and the most perplexing.

Suddenly Plöwitz burst into the room.

"Ah, Mr. Coplestone," he said, "you are more accustomed to solitude than I. You do not find it overwhelming, eh?"

"I am accustomed to it," was all I said.

"You are more of a philosopher than I. It is most distressing to me. I have been working alone, and I am wretched."

Though I bore the man no good will, Heaven knows, yet he was always civil enough to me, and I could do no less than express a conventional wish that I could be of service to him.

"Ah," said he promptly, "you would find it dull to sit with me while I write—eh?"

To sit with him while he wrote—where?

"Not at all," I answered, "if you desire company."

"Come, my good friend"—he took my arm as he spoke—"I am moped to death by myself; the sound of my pen grates on my nerves."

He led me across the hall to the jealously-guarded partition door.

I instinctively hesitated.

"You do not know this way—eh? It is Mr. Beaufoy's study. There, my good friend, sit down," and he placed a comfortable chair for me, and seated himself at the writing-table.

"I have a large correspondence," he said, "and many affairs to attend to."

There was a small pile of letters beside him, and the floor near the waste-paper basket was strewn with torn envelopes and letters which had missed that receptacle. A quantity of ashes on the hearth showed that some papers had been consigned to the fire.

I observed the room at leisure. Truly there was no

apparent reason for Mr. Beaufoy's jealous precautions. Not a sign of anything unusual or compromising was to be seen. The secret door was perfectly hidden by the book-shelves. Plöwitz went on busily writing, occasionally saying a word or two to himself in some foreign tongue, but too low for me to catch what he said; probably it was at the end of the sentences he was writing. I made use of the time to observe the garden, into which the windows looked. I could see a high wall covered with richly-coloured creepers. This garden must be that inner one, whose wall, and the little door in it, I had noticed from outside. I had a great curiosity to see this garden. It might be that one of the upper windows, looking upon it, might show me the face of which I had so often thought.

At last Plöwitz threw down his pen and began putting his papers away in a despatch box. As he did so he talked.

"Mr. Coplestone, do you not know that you are a very favoured man?"

"I don't see it," I answered bluntly.

"You do not see it? That is the pity," he said most sympathetically. "You English, pardon me, are never too quick to see some things. Have you ever asked yourself what you are here for?"

"I have no need to ask myself while I do my duty, and I certainly have no need to answer anybody else."

I could not imagine what he was aiming at, but he evidently did not mean to be offensive.

"Pardon," he said, "you think I take a liberty. No, my friend—no. I would do you a service—you and another. You were engaged to teach our poor dear Miss Fortescue music. Now, is it usual to engage a gentleman in such a way solely to teach a young lady music?"

"You do not know, perhaps," I said, "that Mr. Beaufoy is interested in the welfare of the blind."

"Do you know who is the master of this house?" he asked. "It is not Mr. Beaufoy; it is his beautiful daughter. Why did she engage you? To please her cousin? Bah! To please you? Well—to please herself?"

"Dr. Plöwitz," I began, in extreme indignation at his impertinence, rising from the armchair, "I cannot allow this sort of conversation a moment longer. To me it is an unwarrantable familiarity; to Miss Beaufoy——"

"Mr. Coplestone," he interrupted, laying his hands lightly on my shoulders a moment, "I am not surprised that you think me impertinent. You are wrong, though. I am an old friend of the family. I speak for their good, and I would do you a good office, too. You have heard me. I know what I am saying. I see for you, as you cannot see for yourself. What I have said is buried between us. Act as you think fit." He went to the door. "Come.

I must go out a little." He led me out, and turned up the staircase. "Ah. I have left the door open," he cried. "Shut it, Coplestone, like a good fellow!"

I turned back. He ran upstairs. Quickly I slammed the door from the inside, and while the sound still rang in the hall, opened it, slipped out, and put it quietly ajar. I then went into the library. In a minute I heard a step coming downstairs, and Plöwitz called out:

"If they return, kindly say I will soon be back."

He went out by the hall-door, and I sauntered to the window. There, just turning round into the avenue, I caught sight of a figure, an old man with long grey hair and grey beard, hurrying off with the buoyant step of the youthful and vivacious Plöwitz!

I had no time then to lose in speculation. I hastened back through the partition-door, which I carefully closed behind me, and in a minute was out in the garden through the study window. It was a small oblong plot of grass, with vines and creepers, and fruit-trees trained along the walls, and herbs and old-fashioned garden flowers in the narrow beds beneath. I gazed anxiously at the back of the house, at the upper windows. My heart gave a great bound of joy, as I saw sure enough at an open window the face of Mary Fortescue. It was but for an instant, and I stood amazed, devising some means for opening communication with her. But as I debated the advisability of con-

fessing that I had seen her, a narrow glass-door opened, and she appeared.

With a low cry of joy she hurried towards me, holding out both her hands.

"Mr. Coplestone, Mr. Coplestone, how did you come here?" she cried.

I kept my presence of mind and sought her hands.

"Miss Fortescue—Mary. You have been ill. Are you getting well?"

"I am better," she said, in a choked voice.

"Have you really been ill? I have been so anxious. What has been the matter?"

"I have been so lonely, so wretched," she sobbed; "my only safety is in being ill. To be dead would be better."

"What is it," I asked, deeply moved.

"I cannot tell you," she said, sobbing without restraint. Her poor tears fell on my hands as she held them.

"Yes, tell me," I said gravely.

"They want to force me to marry Dr. Plöwitz," she sobbed out with a shudder.

I laughed.

"That is to be as *you* wish."

"Oh, I cannot help myself. There is no one to help me."

"Indeed there is," said I. Her pitiful tear-stained eyes,

whose beauty was in no wise diminished by the big tears in them, went straight to my heart, and if I had not been restrained by the reserve of love, I should have clasped her to my heart in pure pity. "Indeed there is." She looked with a shy hope, almost a smile, as I spoke thus. My self-restraint took a great slide. "Dear Miss Fortescue, I will help you."

A startled look shot over her face; but gladness was dawning strongly. I clasped her hands more firmly, and looked into the depths of her soul.

"My poor child, how pale you look," I said, turning all my deep love into pity.

She raised my hands to the level of her shoulders with a sudden start. She peered into my eyes with a look of wondering joy, and then burst out loud:

"Oh, you can see! You can see! Thank God—thank God, you can see!"

In another second that dear head would have been on my breast, and her thanks to God would have passed somehow through my unworthy lips, when a metallic laugh pierced the rapture like an envenomed lance.

"Go in, Mary, at once," said the imperious voice of the Basilisk. Mary drooped away and went. "Now, Mr. Coplestone," she went on, "now, do you believe Mary Fortescue is insane?"

CHAPTER XV.

A DIFFICULT POSITION.

THE temptation to act a heroic part is, I conceive, often as strong and as dangerous as that which prompts to conduct of which we ought to be ashamed. At Miss Beaufoy's derisive question, "Now do you believe she is insane?" my impulse was to tear to shreds the network of deceit, to defy the malign influence which poisoned at least two lives, to vindicate triumphantly, melodramatically, the persecuted girl to whom I felt that my protection, my love, were irrevocably plighted. That sad face, whose beauty seemed mysteriously enhanced by the pallor of care, prompted me to an instantaneous and bold defiance of our enemies. But a stronger power than the impulse of a showy pseudo-chivalry checked me. To show my hand would be to secure my instant dismissal—to put me in a position which the world would see only to my disadvantage. Even if I succeeded in proving what I knew, in substantiating what I suspected, how could I safeguard that timid and shrinking young life into which, as I suspected, the iron of systematic tyranny and wrong had too fully entered already? If my

worst suspicions were right, at what would they stop to injure me, to silence her? If I were wrong, on what ground could I ever hope for favour or recognition at the hands of her lawful guardians? These thoughts, or rather this process of thought, kept me fortunately silent.

Mary went slowly away with bent head. The Basilisk stood with a curious smile eyeing her. I stood speechless. As Mary reached the door she turned, and looked at me. There was a pained, doubting expression on her face, a pitiful, beseeching look in her eyes which a minute before would have jeopardised everything. The rapid course of thought had had time to curb impulse, and that look, which I treasured for ever, only steeled me to play the part I recognised as necessary to her safety, to my dearest hopes.

As Mary Fortescue disappeared, the silence was broken by a laugh from Miss Beaufoy.

"You have a talent for getting into strange places," she said. "Do you know where you are?"

"In the garden, I presume," I replied, assuming a certain stiffness, as if in resentment of her merriment.

"Plöwitz is so careless," she went on. "I suppose he let you into the study."

"I cannot see what the objection to my presence in the study can be," I said. "Dr. Plöwitz seemed to find my company helpful, even in the study."

"Plöwitz is such a sociable creature. My father thinks it sacred ground, and it is really wrong of Plöwitz to go against his wishes."

"I know nothing about it," I said shortly. "I am not in a position to exercise much discretion as to where I go."

"I know it," she said, suddenly assuming her tenderest tone; "I know it. Forgive me. Let us get back to the house."

Saying this she put her arm through mine, and, locking her hands together, led me back through the house into the drawing-room.

She sat beside me on a low, large sofa, and presently came round to the subject which was certainly uppermost in my mind.

"Mr. Coplestone," she said, "there are some things one doesn't talk about even to very intimate friends, but with you—we—I make an exception. You were deeply shocked, I know, with what you heard about Mary's mental state. You resented it, I think." She smiled a little here, and just touched my hand. "Why, I do not know, but I think you will see now that we, who have known her all her life, were right—that you, who have taught her music a few weeks, were wrong."

This was staggering. Tone, look, gesture—all were perfect; but, unfortunately for her theory, Mary Fortescue was right, I could see everything.

"It is shocking," I said rather hesitatingly, "to find oneself for the first time face to face with insanity, especially in the case of an apparently bright intellect with which one has been brought into close relations such as ours were."

"I would say nothing more about it," she went on in a low, melodious voice, gazing into the fire; "but that poor dear Mary gets such strange notions into her head. You have heard of some of them. She has fancies of a girlhood of wealth; her father was very poor, really. She imagines all sorts of things about constraint being put upon her here. She is perfectly free, except when her health compels me to exercise a little authority, as it does now. Poor Plöwitz, who is such a good man, is infinitely concerned about it, as you may imagine."

"Is she fond of Plöwitz?" I asked, with a sense of huskiness I tried in vain to overcome.

"Oh, passionately devoted to him," said she, looking at me with sparkling eyes. "I sometimes think that his prolonged absences have had something to do with unhinging her mind. She is a girl of deep feelings. She does not show them much, but they are very, very strong. Dr. Plöwitz's professional occupations prevent him being here often, and she pines when he is away."

"Poor girl!" I said, not knowing what to say.

"But he has a good scheme in his head," she said.

"His aunt and cousins live near Pyrmont, and we are thinking of sending her to them, where she can be much more in his society at times."

This fairly staggered me. My face must have shown my feelings.

"You seem strangely affected," said she critically.

"I shall lose my pupil."

"You can get another."

"A man in my condition does not easily find a home like this."

"The other pupil is not far to seek. Will you not take me?" she asked, softly and sweetly.

"I *can* teach her," I answered; "but you—what can I do for you? You are a better musician than I am!"

"Oh, no," she almost whispered; "Oh, no! I have no taste like yours. I have no soul like yours. You can teach me everything. You can put the soul into all the music that I can only make into a statue."

Flattery will have its way. I was as much on my guard as I could be, but earnest flattery—flattery which I hoped and believed to be the expression of a truth, softened me, and conciliated me towards her, though I suspected her of deliberate and deep-laid falsehood about Mary. The light was of a romantic and confidential kind. The fire was warm and large without flickering, and the twilight made the room look sumptuous and mysterious. The

woman so close beside me was very beautiful. Her proud eyes were lightened with soft fire, her pale face was tinged with a slight underglow. Her long white hands touched mine now and then patronisingly or friendly as she talked.

"Ah, Miss Beaufoy," I said, "you should have a far more able master than I am. You are too good for me. I do not deserve this confidence. I could never be your master."

"Yes, you could," she said very softly.

"Then my sight is so against me," I went on, refusing to put an interpretation on her words which was as obvious as it was embarrassing.

"Ah, poor eyes!" she murmured, pressing a cool hand lightly over my forehead, which was hot with worry and agitation; "poor eyes! but you will not feel the want of your sight here."

"Miss Beaufoy," I said, taking her hand from my brow, and holding it, "I should be no man, no gentleman, if I did not feel deeply your care, your kindness. But, if my pupil goes, I must return to St. Bartimeus's till I can find something else to do. To take you as my pupil would be an abuse of your friendship, and an insult to your powers."

"No," she said; "no, it would not. You must stay; you will stay. I cannot bear to think of your going back to that miserable place, and leaving a miserable place behind you."

"Miss Beaufoy, would you have me stay against my will—if I feel it against my self-respect?"

"But you cannot go unless I choose," she said with a low laugh. "I can keep you here if I will. You cannot find your way out."

Then she suddenly, almost hysterically, changed her tone. She caught my hands, and held them to her face. Her cheeks were wet with tears.

"Forgive me—forgive me!" she said, and long sobs began to shake her frame. "You are angry," she said.

"No, indeed," I answered, feeling that an earthquake might do more good than harm at Hanover Lodge just then. "No, indeed," in as soothing a tone as if I were speaking to a wilful child. The imperious Giulia seemed to take comfort from the tone. Full of the strangest mixture of feelings, over which, like the moon over a troubled sea, the face of Mary Fortescue seemed to shine and shed a little of Heaven's sorely-needed light, I racked my brains for a clue to the right way out of this trying little scene.

The sudden tameness of the Basilisk, I may honestly say, filled me with alarm, but help came from an unexpected quarter. The door opened, and in the dim light, Plöwitz appeared. He came up to us, and gazed at us with a quizzical sort of half-smile. The Basilisk was absolutely unconcerned.

She laid her hand again in mine, and said calmly :

"I have been having quite a battle with Mr. Coplestone to induce him to remain."

"And he ?"

Again that look of intelligence between the pair.

"And he," said the Basilisk, before I could deny or explain—"and he will not desert me."

"Good," said Plöwitz gaily; "that is right; that is well. You must let Mary know that. It will reconcile her the more to leaving you."

CHAPTER XVI.

A BLOW.

My position was now truly a terrible one. My sin, if sin it were under the circumstances, had found me out. The secret motive, which had really prompted my deceit, had grown stronger and stronger; and I found myself as powerless as ever to protect where I now so deeply loved. At least, I had paid some tribute to the claims of duty in expressing a desire to leave Hanover Lodge. My proposal had been rejected by the Basilisk; and I had at least the satisfaction of staying now distinctly at the request of another. How my presence could benefit her, whom I knew so surely to need my help I could not see. But at any rate, it was better to be near her than far away.

For the next two days life glided on in the quietest and most uneventful manner. Miss Beaufoy was as calm as ever she had been. No sign of deeper feelings disturbed her serene and dignified friendliness.

On the third day, Mr. Beaufoy remarked that he was going to town on some business.

"Perhaps, Mr. Coplestone," he said with much suavity, "you would like to accompany us? You have not been

outside the place yet since you came. I should particularly like you to come."

I was, in truth, delighted with the suggestion, and readily accepted the invitation.

"We are going to drive, and will start immediately after luncheon," he said.

In spite of all my anxieties, I felt a keen sense of pleasure at thus renewing my acquaintance with the outside world, and I was the better prepared to enjoy the change, inasmuch as Miss Beaufoy had reported the day before that Mary was a great deal better—almost recovered, in fact. It seemed not unlikely that on our return I might see her once more in the drawing-room, awaiting us, and that the interest of life might once more revive.

Luncheon was scarcely over when the sound of wheels was heard on the drive. I saw a very quiet-looking carriage, drawn by one very quiet-looking horse, driven by Hardy. There was something very unpretentious about the equipage, and yet there was a certain distinction. Quietness and quality were combined, and the one horse was quite episcopal in his dignity and decorum.

I hoped for some reasons that Plöwitz would accompany us, and, having had evidence of his dislike to solitude, I rather expected that he would. But he saw us into the carriage with his accustomed politeness, and went back, full of bows and smiles, into the solitary house.

The drive was most delightful to me. The afternoon was very fine—a soft sunny autumn afternoon. My emotions of delight were too deep for words. My companions, after a few remarks, relapsed into silence, and left me free to enjoy my meditations, and to make the best use I could of my eyes without betraying too vivid an interest in the autumn scenery and the signs of life around us. We called at the offices of several charitable and educational societies, and I observed that Mr. Beaufoy was treated with great respect by the officials, one or other of whom accompanied him back to his carriage, and showed that sort of politeness which is bestowed upon a man with whom it is well to be, and to be seen to be, on good terms. Hardy, solemnly seated on the box behind the episcopal horse, struck my sense of humour with considerable force, but Mr. Beaufoy, unctuously accepting the toadying of the officers of charitable societies, disgusted me, and the idea of a day of discoveries and revelations took a rather dramatic form in my thoughts. Miss Beaufoy had remained in the carriage while her father had gone into several offices and depôts for a few minutes at a time. On his return from one of these, Miss Beaufoy expressed a desire to go somewhere for a cup of tea.

"Certainly, my dear," said her father in a round full tone which was very different from his ordinary curt and crisp utterances. He was evidently something of an

actor, and artistically lived up to the part he was playing. "Certainly, my dear. We will go to the Psychophantastical Society," and he directed Hardy to drive there.

Here we alighted, and Mr. Beaufoy very kindly guided me up the steps, and along the spacious corridor of this wealthy and useful society's depôt, which combines shops, show-rooms, offices, committee-rooms, and what we now sought—a spacious tea-room, where members could combine business with light refreshments.

As we sat in the decorous gloom of this room, impregnated with the spirit of sanctimony and bohea, Mr. Beaufoy began to talk very kindly of my condition. He enlarged on the magnitude of the work done by the Society, and on the number of persons of all kinds in its employment.

"I don't think *you* would find any difficulty in getting a post here—with my influence," he said.

"If Mr. Coplestone wanted one," said Miss Beaufoy calmly.

"If Mr. Coplestone wanted one," repeated her father impressively. "And that," he went on, "leads up to a subject on which I wish to speak. I engaged you under certain and somewhat peculiar conditions. My choice"—here the gleam of a smile for a moment illuminated Miss Beaufoy's pale face—"my choice has been more than justified by your conduct and your talents."

I bowed. Miss Beaufoy smiled without reserve, and said:

"Mr. Coplestone has been so useful that we should find it difficult to spare him."

"Very difficult," said her father. "But, under the circumstances, I do not feel justified in retaining Mr. Coplestone's services."

Abrupt as the announcement was, it was made with such an air of consideration, and even compliment, that it sounded quite flattering; still, I felt it due to myself to inform him that I had already felt that my position was a false one.

"I have thought already that I was not justified in remaining where I have no work to do," I said. "I was speaking about it to Miss Beaufoy a few days ago."

"And as I found Mr. Coplestone very useful," said she, "I begged him to remain."

"Which I was the more ready to do," said I, "as there seem strong hopes that Miss Fortescue will very soon be able to resume her musical studies."

At this the Basilisk again smiled slightly.

"You acted rightly," said Mr. Beaufoy, more and more assimilating his voice and manner to the sombre pompousness of the room. "You were quite right, and your views on the subject were most creditable to you. But circumstances are now changed, and, as Miss Fortescue has left us, I must beg you to consider yourself at liberty to seek another engagement."

"Miss Fortescue has left you?" I enquired, bewildered.

"Miss Fortescue set off this afternoon for Pyrmont, where, I trust, she will be completely restored to health."

This blow completely staggered me. My head swam with the force of conflicting emotions. Mr. Beaufoy's voice went on buzzing in my ears, and his daughter answered him, but for a minute or two I attached no meaning to their words. Mary Fortescue gone! And to Pyrmont! Perhaps with Plöwitz—anyhow to his relations, to be more or less in his power! I rallied from the shock as well as I could, and endeavoured to collect myself, and to summon discretion to my aid. I heard again the words that were being spoken, and realised the meaning of what was said.

"That must be for Mr. Coplestone to decide," Mr. Beaufoy was saying, in a very peevish voice, from which all trace of the magnificent suavity had gone.

"Mr Coplestone has already decided," said the Basilisk; "he is to stay."

"Very well, my dear," rejoined her father. The surrender was complete, though anything but willing.

Miss Beaufoy had evidently insisted on my remaining. I had nothing whatever to say in the matter. My only desire was for a little time to think matters over by myself, and form some practical plan. The only resource I could

think of at the moment was Dr. Shaw. Meantime I did not care to discuss the question of my future movements with those whom I regarded as my enemies. Any further conversation on the subject was stopped by the approach of a subdued and obsequious attendant, who murmured a message into Mr. Beaufoy's ear.

"Canon Crumbley!" said he. "By all means!" And he rose with some haste, and advanced to meet a portly ecclesiastic who was coming across the room.

Canon Crumbley was a large man, of great influence in certain semi-ecclesiastical social-improvement circles, a large and comfortable man, of a most appeasing aspect. It was hard to say which made the more urbane fuss over the other—the Canon or Mr. Beaufoy. The upshot of the meeting was that I was consigned to the care of Hardy to be driven home, while the Canon carried off Mr. and Miss Beaufoy, insisting that they should dine with him, and renew an old friendship with his wife.

I was glad to be alone; but in the solitude of the homeward drive my thoughts soon became unbearable. The abduction of Mary Fortescue—for such it must virtually have been—was the one terrible subject. How could I even tell that she was going to Pyrmont? How, knowing it was a fact, could I trace, follow, help, rescue her?

It was nearly dark when I arrived at Hanover Lodge.

Hardy helped me to alight, and saw me safe into the hall before he drove away again.

As I stood alone in the hall, in blank of thought, a slight noise on the stairs caught my ear. I looked up. Once more I beheld the phenomenon of the folding staircase. From the chasm revealed in the wall Plöwitz stepped forth. As he did so the stairs slowly and noiselessly resumed their place behind him. He came down, greeting me with a loud voice as he came.

"Ah, my dear Coplestone! You back alone? What have you done with your companions?"

I briefly explained that they had stayed for a while to see an old friend. I noticed that Plöwitz's heartiness, which was generally easy enough, if not natural, was now strained, and that he looked vexed and worried.

He came into the library with me, and threw himself into a chair.

"So you have lost your pupil, Mr. Coplestone?" he said.

"So I hear," I replied.

"Ah," he said, with a shudder, "it is duller than ever. How I hate working alone!"

"You should have come to London with us," I suggested.

"I could not; I had work to do here." And, rather inconsistently, he got up, sighed heavily, and went off

through the partition-door, slamming it heavily behind him.

I followed in a minute, and walked slowly up the stairs. I reached the foot of the small flight which I had twice seen fold back. An examination, searching though hurried, revealed what were probably the points of junction, but I could find do trace of levers to work the machinery.

But in the deep stillness of the house, as I gazed at the panelling, intent on finding some clue to the mystery, my ear, on the strain for the least alarm, caught distinctly the sound of a woman's sobs. Whence it came I could not determine. But somewhere not far off I felt sure I heard a woman weeping bitterly. I listened, but to no further purpose, and then went up to my own landing and waited and watched. Presently I heard the study-door opened, and the step of Plöwitz coming into the hall. He looked into the library, apparently, and then came up the stairs. I watched him from the shadow. He came to the mysterious landing, and gave a glance round. There was nothing, from his point of view, to fear, for if he had seen me he would have cared little. He then pressed a knob in the carved wainscoting, and slid a strip of the panelling up. He inserted his hand in the vacancy left, and pulled some sort of lever, and quickly shut down the panel. Easily and noiselessly the stairs swung back, and into the aperture Plöwitz disappeared. Easily and noiselessly the stairs

resumed their usual position, and with a bound I reached the spot where Plöwitz had just stood. I could see no trace of a sliding panel. The workmanship was too neat for that.

But I quickly found a carved knob, which yielded to pressure, and a slip of panelling beneath it easily slid up, and I saw a handle, which was evidently the means of working the staircase. As I gazed at it I was startled by a muffled scream. Come what might, I must probe this mystery. A great dread and a great hope were stirring within me, and maddening me. Again that stifled scream. I pulled the lever. Slowly and surely the machinery worked. I stood within the hidden passage. The stairs closed back, and I stood listening. Voices sounded close to me. A man's voice—Plöwitz's! A woman's—Mary Fortescue's!

A few steps along the narrow passage brought me to a door, which was not quite closed. The light from the chink guided me. I stood close to it, my hand upon the handle.

"Leave me—leave me!" said Mary's voice, in strong and tragic appeal. "Let me die here, if I must; but let me die alone!"

"Ah, Mary," said Plöwitz, "you shall not die—you shall not be alone. You are mine. I will take you away from here."

"Never! Oh, Mr. Plöwitz, why are you so cruel? I have told you I will die here, if I must, but yours I will never be."

"Ah, you do not know me—you do not know me! You must love me! Such love as mine will compel your love in return. You madden me! I am your master. You cannot escape me!"

A cry of terror and of anger brought me into the room. Plöwitz had seized her hands, and was endeavouring to clasp her to his breast. Her beautiful hair was loosened, her eyes wild with anger and alarm. In a moment more and that sweet, sacred face would have been for ever profaned by Plöwitz's hateful kisses, that overtaxed form would have sunk helpless and exhausted into his coward arms, when I sprang into the room, and with one blow of concentrated love and hatred felled him to the ground.

"You—you!" cried Mary with a scream of joy. She sank into my arms, almost as helpless as Plöwitz, who lay senseless as a log upon the floor.

CHAPTER XVII.

A NARROW ESCAPE.

HER first thought on recovering from the surprise and terror of the last few minutes, was for my safety.

"You must not let him see you. They will kill you if they know of this," she said.

"I will kill him if he dares to molest you," I said.

"No; he will do me no harm; I will not see him again."

"How can you prevent it?"

"I can keep in my own room," she said quickly. "He is recovering. Do not let him see you—pray do not let him see you!"

Plöwitz showed unmistakable signs of coming to life again; and Mary drew me, with a force which was chiefly derived from her petitioning tones, towards the door.

"Do not stay," she whispered earnestly.

I turned towards the secret entrance.

"This is the way," she said, indicating the other direction. She did not know of the staircase machinery then.

As I recognised the advantage of learning all I could about the geography of the house, I followed her directions without trying to enlighten her. At the end of a dark and narrow passage we came to a door which opened upon a sort of back landing.

"Where does this lead to?" I asked.

"The way you came up," she whispered in a tone of surprise.

There was no time for explanation, and I could at least find my way into the hall; but as I got half-way down the stairs, I heard the voice of Hardy in conversation with a woman. Mary Fortescue, who was watching anxiously from the top, hurriedly stopped me.

"Stay! There is Hardy! Come back!"

Certainly I could not get by without being discovered, and to remain longer where I was was highly dangerous. Mr. and Miss Beaufoy might be even now returned. Plöwitz would be seeking some explanation of the blow that had struck him so suddenly. I must return the other way at once. I returned to the top of the stairs. I took Mary's hand.

"Come," I said; "I will show you how I came in."

I stepped noiselessly past the door of the room where I had interrupted the interview. Mary had closed it behind us. I paused a second, and heard Plöwitz's voice. Was he moaning in stupefied pain? No; he was swearing

deeply in German, and—yes—I certainly heard him chuckling.

Mary ran back to the end of the passage, to secure her retreat to her room, where she could protect herself from intrusion. I waved my hand to her, and then felt in the dim light for the apparatus, which I was convinced must be somewhere on or in the wall. I had assumed that the means of exit would be obvious. I was proportionately horrified to find that no trace of the desired machinery was to be found. I scrabbled at the woodwork, and pressed vainly at the door. No sign of the apparatus—no symptom of yielding was to be found. I heard the step of Plöwitz in the room hard-by. It was all very well to think that I was more than a match for the puffy and bewildered German. But it was not for myself that I was anxious. There was one, whom I could see faintly at the end of the passage, who was a thousand times dearer to me than life itself, for whose safety I felt myself responsible. All sorts of dangers—unknown dangers—I knew to threaten her. My own escape was nothing to me if she were left behind. Her escape I did not see how to compass. If she fled with me, what had I to offer her? If her guardians claimed her, what had I—I who kept my footing in the house under false pretences—to oppose to their legal claim? In desperation I pressed the panelling, I tried the door. Suddenly I heard a door open, apparently at

the foot of the other staircase. The voice of Hardy sounded distinctly through the silence ; a heavy foot was heard upon the stairs. I saw Mary Fortescue making gestures of desperate urgency. I felt all round the frame of the door with feverish eagerness. No sign of yielding ! No trace of the hidden mechanism !

She saw my plight, evidently. I heard her call to Hardy :

"Is that you, Hardy ?"

"Yes, miss."

"Tell Mrs. Hardy I want to speak to her."

"All right, miss, when I've brought these coals up."

"No—now, Hardy."

"These coals is heavy," said Hardy, his voice getting nearer, and his steps sounding closer on the stairs.

There was an energy in her voice, and a determination to cover my retreat in her attitude, which strengthened my belief that my best course, in the interest of both, was to make good my retreat, and formulate some different plan of action—of escape.

The handle of the door I had tried in vain. It turned a little either way, but produced no result. As Hardy's steps sounded close to the top of the stairs, as Plöwitz apparently prepared to come out and look about him, as Mary shook her hand at me with a gesture of despairing haste, I leant all my weight upon the door, upon the

handle which was such a mockery to my hopes. It yielded to my weight. It gave way with a gentle click, and, before I could realise my good fortune, the door swung open, and I stepped out into the light of the hall-lamps, and the wall closed behind me ; and I descended the staircase just as the hall-door opened, and the Basilisk entered, followed by her father, with the flush of the fresh autumn-air tinging the splendid pallor of her cheeks.

"Ah, Mr. Coplestone!" she cried, "here we are! Not very long after you, I dare say. We came by train from Baker Street."

"I hope you feel the better for your drive, Mr. Coplestone," said Mr. Beaufoy, still maintaining his attitude of sanctimonious patronage.

"Very much the better, thank you," I said, "and very much the wiser, after being so long in one place."

"Ah, yes," he said. "There is no education like that which we derive from communication with our fellow-men."

"'The proper study of mankind is man,'" said the voice of Plöwitz, who at this moment entered the room. "Have you had a pleasant afternoon?"

"Very," I replied, anticipating the others.

"And you?" said the Basilisk, with meaning.

"On the whole—yes," said Plöwitz. "But not altogether."

And he smiled, without a trace of resentment on his face.

"What is the matter?" asked Miss Beaufoy, her eyes wide-open with wonder, for Plöwitz looked rather flustered, and there was a red lump on one side of his head and face, where he had hit the wall in his fall.

He passed his hand lightly over the injured surface, and smiled as sweetly as ever.

"I have received a shock," he said; "a stunning shock. But such a shock only increases my esteem—my determination."

The face of the Basilisk expressed unmitigated wonder—the countenance of the professor the kindest regard.

"I was, perhaps, too sanguine," he continued. "But courage challenges the admiration of courage. The foeman is certainly worthy of the steel of a Plöwitz."

"More so than you think, fighter with women!" I muttered, as at the sound of the first gong we went off to prepare for dinner.

CHAPTER XVIII.

DEEPER STILL.

PLÖWITZ evidently imagined that Mary had struck him to the ground. It was equally evident that he bore her no sort of ill-will for the blow. This absence of petty resentment was not at all reassuring to me. It was rather terrible. There was in it a sort of calm determination. He had marked the quarry for his own, and was rather inclined to admire her for showing fight than to be angry with her for resisting him.

My own chief object now must be, I saw, in all things to avoid suspicion, and at the first opportunity to open communications with Mary Fortescue.

Luckily, I was in possession of the secret of the approach to the concealed entrance. The fact that there was a means of exit by way of the back staircase, showed that the other way was designed for facilities of flight or concealment, rather than that, as I at first imagined, the rooms themselves were hidden. Still, there was sufficient cause for alarm in the fact that they had obviously wished to deceive me as to Mary's movements, presumably from a suspicion that I was

prepared to take her part as far as I could. That they should deliberately state that she had set out for Pyrmont at the very time that she was kept out of the way in their own house, and subjected to the odious attentions of one for whom she expressed a perfect abhorrence, was enough to determine me to use every effort to counteract their designs.

As we sat at dinner, and I observed the strange expression of puzzled amusement on Plöwitz's face, and the mark on temple and cheek which resulted from his fall—for it was the accident of hitting his head against the wall rather than the direct violence of my blow which had reduced him to temporary insensibility—I longed to tell him of what I knew, and to have it out with him, man to man. But this was a gratification which must be deferred.

"I hope Mary will have a good passage," said Miss Beaufoy, when we were seated at dinner. "She is such a bad sailor."

"It is a very calm night," said Mr. Beaufoy, "and the glass has been standing high for some days now."

"They are very good boats," said Plöwitz, joining in the little concert of mendacity. "And it is a perfectly comfortable passage from Harwich."

I felt quite delighted at the sense of hidden power which I possessed, not only in being able to study their expressions, but to have discovered by accident their

falsehood, and the whereabouts of their quasi-captive.

After dinner Miss Beaufoy invited me to play for her in the drawing-room.

I turned the conversation again to the subject which was uppermost in my thoughts.

"I fear Miss Fortescue will find it dull being away among strangers?" I began.

"They are not strangers to her; and, at any rate, they are the relations of her affianced husband."

"Are you sure that this is a match which will make her happy?" I asked.

The Basilisk laughed at me, a very unusual course, with one of her calm and dignified manner.

"Why shouldn't it?" she asked.

"I mean, do you think she really wishes to marry Dr. Plöwitz?"

"The best answer to that is," she replied rather icily, "Why should she consent, otherwise?"

"She gave me the impression of being subdued, and very easily influenced by pressure, specially by unkindness."

"I don't think you are much of a judge of character, Mr. Coplestone. Mary has a very strong will of her own." Here she laughed, as if in affectionate remembrance of little passages of arms, in which she had not

come off victorious. "And Dr. Plöwitz is not at all likely to be unkind to her, or to anyone. He has a remarkably good temper. He has given evidence of wonderful self-control and good-nature only to-day."

"Pardon my asking it, but do you think, for instance, that this journey to Germany was quite to her taste?"

"Do you know, Mr. Coplestone, that this sounds rather as if a stranger were interfering in family affairs, and talking about what he cannot possibly understand?"

"Not at all, believe me. I naturally take an interest—a great interest—in Miss Fortescue. But not seldom a stranger observes things that nearer relations overlook, and you must remember that I have had good opportunities of learning something of her character and tastes."

"And you must remember that Miss Fortescue is engaged to our friend, Dr. Plöwitz; that she is my cousin and oldest friend, and that you have got some strange fancies into your head which would be more intelligible if you were in the habit of reading silly romances."

"Pardon me if I have taken a liberty," I said.

"What you have said is easily pardoned," she replied sweetly, "and pardon me for speaking of you as a stranger, for you have ceased to be that long ago. Mary will come back, no doubt, much the better for her trip, and is now, no doubt, happy enough in the change and excitement of travelling."

I played a few notes on the piano in the silence that followed this closing speech, admiring in a way the beautiful Sapphira who was rolling off these melodious mendacities so near me, when a noise of a slamming door and hurried footsteps reached my ear. A sudden look of anger and alarm came into Miss Beaufoy's face. The noise came nearer, and suddenly in the doorway appeared the form of Mary. Miss Beaufoy started up; Mary was about to speak; the first sound of articulation was audible, when Mrs. Hardy, who was evidently in pursuit, threw a coarse hand over her mouth, and roughly drew her away. At the same moment Plöwitz came stamping into the room, singing noisily.

I had started up in anger and alarm. Plöwitz, with his clumsy efforts to cover the noise of the interruption, was greatly perturbed. Miss Beaufoy alone recovered or preserved her presence of mind.

"Dear me, professor," she said, "that is a wonderful entrance! Are you composing an opera?"

"Pardon me! I startled you. I have just had a surprise—a pleasant surprise—a letter of good news, and I was excited."

"You have quite upset Mr. Coplestone," she said, while I made a desperate effort to control myself.

"I couldn't think what was the matter," said I.

"Ah, dear Coplestone, I forgot how sensitive you are."

He eyed me very narrowly, and with a strange look of suspicion. "It is curious how keen the faculties become when one cannot see. Is it not so? You looked as if you had seen something rather surprising."

He gazed very fixedly at me as he spoke.

"Ah, doctor," said I, "you don't make allowance for the imagination."

"The imagination," he said, pointedly, "requires to be very carefully controlled. May I join you, Miss Beaufoy?"

"Most certainly."

And Plöwitz continued to watch me in a way which became positively insupportable, the more so as I dared not notice or resent it. It had the effect of driving me to my own room very early, and leaving Plöwitz to confer alone with the Basilisk—a conference which I felt sure would bode neither me nor Mary any good.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE WRONG MAN.

WHATEVER ill the conferences of Plöwitz and Miss Beaufoy might bode towards us, I had at least the advantage of being able to observe without exciting observation. The first fruits of my vigilance were uneasy thoughts that Plöwitz had indeed some inkling of my secret, and was resolved either to detect my false pretences, or to frustrate the schemes to which they invited me to aspire. But I resolved, while exercising all the caution I could muster, to act for the interest of Mary Fortescue and myself, precisely as though no suspicion of the real state of affairs were aroused in any quarter. The advantage given to me by having surprised the secret of the staircase, I resolved to use as freely as was compatible with safety. My first care was to open up communications with Mary—to satisfy myself of her welfare, and to take such steps to secure her safety as occasion might put it into my power to adopt.

I therefore watched my opportunity carefully, and in a day or two found a lucky hour in which I might, with a

reasonable hope of success, try to turn my knowledge to account.

Everybody had gone out except myself—a state of affairs which I had hardly dared to hope would come about so soon. The house was profoundly still. I left the drawing-room door open, and played as loudly as I could several of the airs which Mary and I had sung or played most frequently together. Then, looking carefully about me that I might not be observed by any of the Hardy faction, I set the mechanism of the staircase in operation, and in a minute stood within the narrow passage-way.

Some instinct had warned Mary to be on the watch. Scarcely had I advanced cautiously as far as the door of the room in which I had so roughly brought Plöwitz's wooing to a close, when Mary appeared at the end of the passage. She flew towards me when she made sure who it was.

"I knew you would come soon," she said. "I heard you playing, and I felt sure you meant it for me."

"They were the songs you like best. I scarcely dared to hope you would understand their message."

She blushed, and then asked anxiously:

"Does Dr. Plöwitz know that you were here that day?"

"No; he seems to think that it was you who in some way taught him a lesson. Have you not seen him since?"

"No. I do not fear him. I can avoid him as a rule if I hear him coming. Anyhow, I am not so much afraid of him for myself."

"For whom then?"

"I am afraid for you," she said earnestly, again colouring and looking shyly at me, in strange contradiction to the earnestness of her speech. "I am afraid for you. He would not—he could not hurt me. But if he thought you were opposing him—still more, if he imagined you could see, he would stand at nothing for revenge—for safety."

"He would be right," I answered. "But you? How is it with you? Helpless and a prisoner as you virtually are, I tremble for your safety."

"No," she replied, "you exaggerate my danger. It is true that I am a prisoner, but I would be a prisoner of my own choice rather than be constantly in the society of Dr. Plöwitz, who likes me too much, or of Giulia, who loves me too little."

A brief time of conversation, interesting only to ourselves, followed, and then my concern for Mary's safety steeled me to a hurried parting. But as I went out on to the landing, just as the wall closed behind me, I thought, most vividly, that I had seen a figure—the figure, as it seemed, of Hardy—standing at the end of the passage. Had he been listening? Had he seen me? And, if so, how

could I tell—how guard against the probable revenge of Plöwitz ?"

A few days passed, in which this doubt and the uncertainty as to what effect the occurrence, if observed, might have had upon the treatment of Mary Fortescue, gave me but little rest day and night. The Basilisk was almost at her best and sweetest. Plöwitz was cordial enough in manner, but there was a look of green jealousy and hatred in his eyes which was new, and which justified my worst suspicions. I could believe, at times, from that look, that he had wreaked his envy and chagrin by even the death of her who had been unhappy enough to attract his unwelcome addresses. My anxiety was so great that I took the earliest opportunity when Plöwitz had set out for a walk, towards twilight one afternoon, to assure myself of the continued welfare of Mary. I hastened to the staircase and pulled the lever. Scarcely had I set my foot within the passage when Mary, pale and anxious, came running towards me.

"Oh, go!" she cried; "you are in great danger!"

"How ?" I asked. "Who knows I am here ?"

"Hush!" she whispered. "Plöwitz knows all. Hardy is even now signalling him to return. He saw you last time, and Dr. Plöwitz will stand at nothing. Hardy has been on the watch ever since, and when Dr. Plöwitz goes out, it is on purpose that he may have a chance of catching you here."

"Well, I may catch *him* here," said I, rather nettled at this assumption that all the risk was to be mine in an encounter with the professor."

"You would have no chance. This is a dreadful house. People have been killed here before now. Nothing is known of these things outside. Hardy is ordered, I know, to lock the machinery of the staircase if he finds you here and then you cannot escape.

At this moment I heard a stealthy footstep upon the back stair, and while I stepped back into the little morning-room where Plöwitz had interviewed Miss Fortescue with such unsatisfactory results, she herself rapidly reached her own room farther on, and I had the satisfaction of hearing the gentle click of the bolt that told me that she was in security.

The figure of a man, which in the dim light I read to be Hardy, came quietly along the passage; very slowly, as if fearful of making a noise. When he got nearly opposite the doorway in which I was standing, the gentle creaking of the staircase machinery made itself audible. The light from the hall shone for a moment into the dusk of the passage, and a figure which looked like that of Plöwitz quickly entered. Hardy, from where he was crouching, had not enjoyed the advantages that I had, and awaited cautiously the approach of the new-comer. I saw him, my eyes being now accustomed to the darkness, I saw him sidle past the form of Plöwitz, who was waiting apparently for

a signal, or to get his eyes accustomed to the light. There was a slight click as Hardy reached the lever, which worked the staircase. Had he been warned, then, rather late, and was he on the lookout for me ? Did he take Plöwitz for an unlicensed intruder ? Apparently he did. But Plöwitz ? At the sound made by Hardy he turned and raised his hand. There was a long dagger in it.

"You are there!" he hissed.

Hardy, seeking to secure his prisoner, promptly laid a hand on Plöwitz's collar, and then there was a quick blow, a gurgle, a gasp, a heavy, helpless-sounding fall.

"Ha, ha, Mr. Music-Master!" chuckled Plöwitz, "you have found out more than is desirable. It is bad for you. Plöwitz never has to strike a second blow."

CHAPTER XX.[1]

HOW HARDY WAS BURIED.

THE blow had been meant for me! I stood within a few feet of my intending murderer. On the floor, a dark mass in the darkness, lay the body which Plöwitz took for me! Close to the murderer stood his intended victim. He would have murdered the blind man—the blind man was the only witness of his crime.

The only witness? Nay, what do I hear? The rustle of a dress, the sound of a voice that sounds strangely out of place in this atmosphere of sudden horror.

"Oh, what have you done—what have you done?"

The voice of Mary Fortescue, low, but full of anguish and despair.

"Go back, Miss Fortescue," said Plöwitz, in that curt tone which is not discourteous when used to women in times of great emergency. "A burglar has broken into the house. I have secured him."

"A burglar!"

There was nothing but incredulity and anguish in the tone—none of the fear which Plöwitz read in it.

"Do not be alarmed," he said, I have secured him. Hardy and I will take him down to the lodge and send for a constable."

"But you have hurt him—you have killed him!" she moaned.

"Nonsense!" he replied, losing all pretence of suavity; "nonsense—he is stunned. Go to your room. He is reviving!" and he stood over the figure, as if to secure the prisoner. Then he suddenly started back wildly. "My God!" he panted hoarsely. "I have killed Hardy!"

"You have killed him!" echoed Mary, in a voice in which horror and joy seemed to my ear to be strangely blended.

"Nonsense!" he repeated more harshly than before.

He stepped over the prostrate form, and advanced a few steps up the passage towards where Mary was standing, while love and dread had been fighting in her breast, until she learnt that her worst fears, at any rate, were without foundation.

"Miss Fortescue, you must forget this scene." His words were nothing but a formula appropriate to any trying occasion. The way in which they were uttered made them a fierce command—a deadly menace. "You must forget this scene. You must go into your room. You must remain there until you receive word that you may come out. Shall I conduct you to your chamber?"

The nearer approach of the doctor was enough to give effect to his commands. Mary hastily retreated, and, with great relief, I heard her lock her door.

Plöwitz returned—this episode took but a few seconds—to the body of Hardy, and, taking a match-box from his pocket, struck a light, for, with the closing of Mary Fortescue's door, the gloom was again deep. There was no gas, but a pair of candles stood in sconces on the passage wall. He lit these, and then anxiously but carefully examined his victim.

"Dead beyond question," he said. "Plöwitz never needs to strike a second blow. Poor devil! what sent you into my way like this? Had you been fooling me about this fellow Coplestone? Ah, it were bitter fooling for thee if thou wert."

"Poor devil!" he went on in a different tone; "what a splendid stroke that would have been for Coplestone! Scarcely a tell-tale drop of blood to be seen. But, friend Hardy, though it is a neat piece of work, I must not keep the evidence of my skill too long on view."

He stood upright, looking about him in thought, and then took a step towards the door of the room in which I was concealed.

"This would do for the present," he muttered, "for the key is in the door; and if I take it with me, no one could enter."

I felt that I was in for either a life-and-death struggle with a detected and armed murderer, or for a long vigil in the dark with the corpse of the murdered man. I decided instinctively and immediately for the former. I determined to attack him while encumbered with the body, and endeavour to possess myself of his dagger. Beyond that, distinct intentions had not time to go, but I felt that the possession of the dagger would be in itself inspiration as to the proper course. But while I began to prepare myself for the moment of action, Plöwitz suddenly ceased his ghastly task of dragging the helpless heavy form along the floor.

"Fool that I am!" he exclaimed, "The secret stairs."

Surely he could not mean to take the corpse out on to the main staircase into the full light of the hall? Although in that sequestered and uncanny house it would have done him but little harm if he had. But no! The stairs of which he spoke were a new revelation to me. He raised with some difficulty a portion of the flooring, and began to descend, dragging Hardy along with two or three vehement pulls till his head and shoulders were well over the opening; one more vigorous effort, and the form began to disappear also. There was something horribly weird in seeing the body jerked by invisible hands, and being drawn head foremost down the cavity. And after it had

disappeared I could hear the bumping of the heavy heels down the stairs; but I did not wait for Plöwitz to finish his unhallowed journey. I stole from my hiding-place. Keeping well out of the candle-light that my shadow might not be thrown anywhere within his sight, I reached round to the trap-door, which rested with the slightest possible slope against the wall. A violent shake might bring it down. The jarring of the stairs under the tread of the murderer and the heavy body of his victim might do it. So to cover my retreat, and, it might be, to horrify one whom I believed to be subject to superstitious terrors, I brought the trap down on the cavity with a thud, and in a minute, before Plöwitz could have recovered himself sufficiently to get well up the dark and encumbered staircase had pulled the lever, and stood out in the quiet, well-lighted hall. No one was visible, and I hastily reached my room, a prey to emotions which it is simply impossible to describe. I could not give way to my feelings of repugnance to Plöwitz. I had now, in a terrible manner truly, a hold over at least one member of this nefarious household.

Mr. Beaufoy and Plöwitz came in late to dinner. Miss Beaufoy noticed my haggard appearance, and enquired feelingly into the cause. I alleged illness.

Mr. Beaufoy came in looking very grave and absent. Plöwitz, except for a slight pallor, showed no signs of any

emotion, and during dinner he conversed with much freedom and gaiety with Miss Beaufoy.

At dead of night, I heard, as I watched, sleepless and anxious, soft footsteps on the stairs. I stole to the top and watched. Mr. Beaufoy and Plöwitz, with lanterns in their hands, disappeared by the secret stair. After a long absence, they returned, and by the bright moonlight I saw that they were pale, haggard, weary, and stained with earth and chalk. They had been burying Hardy.

CHAPTER XXI.

AN ALLY.

THE terrible result of his suspicions had, so far as I could see, only one result upon Plöwitz. No shadow seemed to rest upon his soul; he appeared on the day succeeding the tragedy, which had cost the unfortunate Hardy his life, with no perceptible diminution of his gaiety—no ruffling of his wonted urbanity. The only difference I could detect in his bearing was a sort of return to his friendliest manner towards myself. Illogical though it might be, it seemed to me that the murder of the wrong man had in some way convinced him that his nascent suspicions of me were groundless, and, detected no longer that haunting enquiring gaze with which he had previously been in the habit of regarding me.

What did Miss Beaufoy know of the tragedy? I could not make out. Judging from her evident cognisance of all that went on, allowing for the hard indomitable spirit of which she gave such manifest proofs, and the remorseless mendacity with which she lent herself to the seclusion of Mary, I judged that she most probably had been made a

partner of the guilty secret. I was confirmed in my suspicions before night.

At dinner some carelessness in the cookery excited Mr. Beaufoy's remark, and he commented on Mrs. Hardy's handiwork so unconcernedly, that I felt once more almost inclined to doubt the evidence of my senses—unable to believe that the man who calmly criticised his wife's cooking, had last night assisted at the recent interment of the murdered husband.

"Poor Mrs. Hardy is a good deal upset," said the Basilisk very sympathetically, "There was quite a scene when I told her of Hardy's departure.

"It is remarkable," commented Plöwitz, "how people of that sort, who are scarcely even barely civil to each other, 'take on,' as they say, when they are separated."

"Especially when they have not been previously consulted about the separation," said Mr. Beaufoy gently.

"Has Hardy gone?" I ventured to ask, though my voice was husky, and I could scarcely control myself.

"Yes," said Giulia. "He has gone abroad on business of Dr. Plöwitz's."

"An invaluable man, Hardy," said the doctor. "So discreet, so silent, so grave."

"With intelligence far above his class," said Beaufoy.

"And never in the way when he's not wanted."

They were deliberately attempting a sort of jesting tone

about the poor fellow, who, whatever his faults or crimes, had evidently been their faithful and trusted servant or accomplice. I now realised more fully than ever the desperately dangerous position in which any act of indiscretion would place me.

"Poor Mrs. Hardy!" the Basilisk continued. "She became quite dramatic, as those people will when they have lost control over themselves. She particularly objected to his having been sent away without her learning anything about it. She wouldn't believe he had gone without saying good-bye to her, and she evidently thinks Germany as dangerous a country for travellers as Central Africa. I was obliged at last to ask her what she thought we had done with him."

"And what did she say to that?" asked Plöwitz, delicately sipping his claret.

"Oh, then, of course, she began to cry, and said it was very hard on her; and so the interview ended."

After dinner I had a long *tête-â-tête* evening with Miss Beaufoy. It was my object in any way to avert all suspicion, to make my position as secure as I could until I could devise some means of rescuing Mary, making good my escape, and, if possible, bringing Plöwitz at least to justice. More tender and charming than ever was this queenly woman to-night; softer her voice, more thrilling her music; and even while I thought with exultant hope of that house of unholy

mysteries being ransacked high and low by the police, I felt the spell, as of a very Circe, which Giulia Beaufoy seemed to exercise in spite of reason and conscience, and the knowledge that she was accessory to a deed of blood.

For all my resolve to use the utmost caution, I found myself, when all was quiet the next afternoon, sauntering close to the little gate which led into the inner-garden. All other means of access to Mary were secured, except the secret staircase, and that I dared not venture just yet to try. Standing by this gate I could see very easily if anyone approached, and should have time to resume my usual slow walk before I was observed. I looked about me, and then, with no hopes of success, tried the latch. The gate was fast. I rattled it softly two or three times, but the lock was firm. As I turned away, a sound which filled me with regret for my useless rashness, caught my ear. The lock was turned, and the gate opened. I took no notice of it, though my nerves got a shock. I believed that no one was at home. My steps were arrested by a voice, low and guarded, calling after me :

"Sir—Mr. Coplestone!"

I turned slowly, and saw standing just inside the gate a woman whom I recognised as Mrs. Hardy.

"Who is it?" I asked.

"It's Mrs. Hardy, sir," she replied. "Oh, please, sir,

would you be so good as to come and speak to me a minute?"

"What do you want with me?" I asked, approaching the gate.

"Oh, sir!" she began at once, "can you tell me anything about my husband?"

Was it a trap? Anywhere else the notion would have been outrageous, but here I did not feel sure that even the widow might not be in a league with the slayers of the husband to entrap me into a confession which might be for the safety of all.

"How should I know anything about your husband, Mrs. Hardy? What about him?"

"Oh, sir," she began, "he's gone away without saying anything to me, and without leaving a line or anything for me, except a message by Miss Beaufoy that he was off sudden to Germany on business of Dr. Plöwitz's. Oh, sir, it ain't like him, and I can't believe it, and I believe there's something wrong about it."

And here the woman, whose apron had been mopping the large tears which gathered at the end of her nose, fairly broke down, and buried her face in the apron, showing her coarse arms and red elbows—a pitiful sight as they jerked with the violence of her sobs.

"Mrs. Hardy," I said, "suppose I could tell you anything, what would you tell me in return?"

"What could you tell me?" she asked in a tone of anguish. "I don't trust them. Nobody's safe here! What have they done with Hardy?"

"Listen to me. Whatever they have done to your husband, no good can come of letting them know that you suspect it."

"Then they have harmed him?"

"I fear they have. I will say nothing more, unless you promise to be calm and help me."

"Look here, sir," she said, suddenly stopping her grief, and looking at me with a dangerous and resolute face, "you tell me what you know,—I can see you know—and I'll tell you what I know, and I'll help you too. And you'll want help."

"Is anybody about?" I asked.

"No one won't be back for a good hour yet," she said. "I know where they've gone to."

She took me through the inner garden into a sort of scullery, whence I could get egress to the hall without much risk, in case of need. And then I told her as briefly as I could the circumstances that led to my being in the corridor, and the tragedy that I had witnessed.

Mrs. Hardy did not give way to the violent demonstrations of grief that I had feared. She was evidently in some mysterious way prepared for the worst. Her one thought now seemed to be revenge.

"Now, Mrs. Hardy," I said, "you know what my interests are here. How can I save Miss Fortescue, and what is the motive of their keeping her hidden away like this?"

Then she gave me her version of the story, which seemed very likely to be the true one.

"They have spent her money—that's what they've done," said she. "And they don't want her to get out so as no one shouldn't put it into her head to stand up for herself, and ask questions."

"Then what is Dr. Plöwitz's interest in marrying her?"

"'Cause he fancies her. If he gets her he can keep her mouth shut."

"But if he marry her, what can prevent his turning round and demanding an account of her fortune from her guardian?"

"He demand! They're all in the same boat."

"What do you mean?"

"They're all in the same line of business; and my poor man was in it too."

"What is it?"

"Making money."

"Counterfeit coin?"

"No, not azackly. It's very good coin; almost as good as the real thing."

Before our interview terminated I had impressed on

Mrs. Hardy the necessity for the utmost prudence, and had secured her promise to assist me in effecting the rescue of Mary. Before that could be done I must secure an ally outside. Then suddenly I thought of Dr. Shaw. The very man! I would write to him and consult him, and get Mrs. Hardy to post the letter.

An alarm of the return of some of the absentees brought our interview to a hurried conclusion. I felt now like a new man. With a friend in the enemy's camp my worst fears were allayed. I must, however, get some writing-materials, and communicate with Shaw at once. I dressed for dinner early that evening, and determined to secrete some pens and paper from the drawing-room as soon as Miss Beaufoy had gone up to dress.

The moment arrived, and I was alone for at least half an hour. A small writing-table, with all appliances, stood against the wall. I sat down and began hastily to write. It would not do. My mind was in such a turmoil that I wrote incoherently, and Shaw would think me mad, especially as I had not informed him in any way of my recovery. I tore one or two attempts into pieces and threw them into the fire.

Then I seemed to get into the vein of straightforward fluency I desired. I very briefly explained the outline of the circumstances, and begged him somehow to procure an interview with me with as little delay as possible, but in no

way to arouse any suspicion. To write to Mr. Beaufoy and invite us over would be, perhaps, the safest way.

I finished the note, folded it, put it into an envelope, and was just beginning to address it when something caused me to look up into a small mirror which hung over the table. The next moment a white hand was on my shoulder, and the Basilisk's beautiful eyes were looking round into mine, as she laughed an inscrutable sort of laugh and said very tenderly:

"So, we can write in spite of our blindness. Can we read too?"

CHAPTER XXII.

BURIED ALIVE.

My secret, then, was discovered!

The blood rushed back upon my heart, and I am not ashamed to confess that fear—a fear that made me silent—was my first emotion. It was a woman who had surprised my secret. True. But it was a woman whose beauty was a menace, whose love was a deadly danger. Her beauty now threatened me; her love, I knew well enough, had doubly imperilled Mary Fortescue's safety. And yet it was hard to believe that perils and dangers were to be feared from the queenlike and graceful creature who, with one beautifully moulded arm almost around me, was looking with a smile, half mockery, half affection, into my eyes.

I quietly covered with one hand the envelope I had been directing. She might have seen the direction; it was too late to guard against that, nor did it greatly matter. Whether she had or not, the battle was likely enough to have to be fought out before the Prussians, in the shape of Dr. Shaw, could arrive upon the field.

I turned to meet her gaze. I saw, closer than ever before, the lustrous wealth of dark hair, with natural waves in its luxuriance, which gave the same effect as light and shade confer upon heads of gold. I saw closer than ever before the broad low forehead, ivory-white, daintily fretted with the irregular outlines of the daintily curving hair; the rounded cheek, on which a flush had settled, so delicately that it seemed almost to doubt its right to touch the severe loveliness of the clear whiteness which it illuminated, was close against my brow; the perfumed perfection of the lips' rich red, showing a little glimpse of small white teeth on one side, and drawn down with a little line of playful irony on the other, seemed to invite to the ratification of a close, a lifelong alliance; the bounteous curve of a divinely-moulded breast stirred the caressing laces that rustled close to my ear with her melodious low laugh. And close—closer than all, gazing, not only into my face, but into my very soul, burning, fascinating, enchanting, those wonderful, inscrutable eyes, that seemed to have mastered all power, and to be content only with maddening, bewildering, tantalising; eyes that made reason cheap and honour a bauble; eyes that robbed the future of its significance, and made the present not only sublime, but eternal! Then, like the breath of air on a spring evening—fresh and innocent, and full of boundless and wholesome promise—came the

thought of Mary, rich in all womanly grace, strong in the weakness that makes men worthy of their strength.

No ! God forbid that I should forget you for a flattering smile ! I fixed my gaze upon the Basilisk as if upon some dangerous animal. I thought of that poor child, so crushed, so wronged ; I thought of the crimes and evil associations of that unhallowed household, and I rose, still looking at Miss Beaufoy, and stood face to face with the beautiful Circe, who wished no good to me nor to her to whom I had vowed service.

We looked at one another in silence. She held both my hands and asked :

'Why have you done this ?"

" There is only one reason which could excuse it."

" And that is ? "

" Love ! "

Her eyes dropped a moment. The colour came back into her cheeks, which had resumed their wonted paleness when I arose and confronted her.

" That is an excuse for everything," she murmured.

" You must remember, Miss Beaufoy," I said, with some agitation, " that I was anxious to go as soon as the immediate reason of my engagement had come to an end."

" I remember that I pressed you to stay," she replied very quietly.

" And I obeyed, against my better reason. I had not

the courage to cut myself off from a newly-found interest, a newly-formed hope in life."

"And I had not the pride," she said, "to listen to your better reason."

There was a pause. I knew not what to say, so I kept silence. She was evidently thinking of something.

At last she spoke again.

"You do not remember me, but I remember you. Some years ago you met me, in the street, in a music-shop in Bond-street. I see you remember the woman, though you did not identify me."

This was said with a sudden flash of jealous anger.

"Yes, it was I. You would have died for me then. I could see it in your face."

"I nearly did die for you," I said, the memory of all that boyish anguish sweeping again over my soul, as I saw the prize for which I would then have given my soul, now vainly placed within my grasp.

"Yes," she went on, "you nearly did die for me. Very likely. You expected me to drop into your arms—to yield to a sigh, to a longing look. You never thought that I might have loved so deeply, but have been a little too old and a little too well-bred to show it to a strange young man, who made wild eyes at me when he met me at St. James's Hall."

"How did you know it was I?"

"How did you know me?"

"How could I ever forget you? I lost my sight—I nearly lost my reason through you."

"I lost you," she said, "but I lost neither my sight nor my reason; still, when I found you again you know that I have done my best not to lose *you* again."

"Miss Beaufoy," I said, taking her hand, "I will not misunderstand you. You have been, so far as I can judge, my friend, according to your light. I will not be fool enough to think that you are making love to me. I was cured of a boyish folly by a terrible calamity, which I always attributed, ungallantly enough, to the power of your eyes. I am no blind boy now, so you must not treat me either with a pity or a familiarity which is due only to one who is either a boy or an object of compassion."

A luminous smile spread over her face.

"That is delicately put," she said, "but I have long ago repented of the harshness I showed, but never felt. And now that a strange chance has put the power of recompense in my hands, I am not going to evade the responsibility. Come, you are still blind. My father must not hear of this fraud." The true Basilisk spoke in this threat, and nerved me afresh. "You will stay here. Mary Fortescue is in Pyrmont. Plöwitz will soon follow her. You shall stay here. You shall take the hardness out of my life. You shall stay with me. I will make amends for all."

Plöwitz with his dagger was nothing to this. I saw that I must speak plainly at all risks, or for ever hold a dishonourable peace.

"If your hands, white as they are, were free from the stains of blood; if your heart could spare some of its love for a helpless girl who has no protector; if your influence were exerted to keep your own people away from criminal pursuits, then I should, however pained by this scene, at least be able to feel honoured by your affection."

I was almost prepared for a sudden dagger-thrust. One glance she shot at me which was almost killing in its sudden intensity of comprehension and hatred. Then she slightly and slowly bowed her beautiful head.

"You labour under some horrible delusion," she said in a choked voice. Then she held out her hand in such a way that I could not refuse it. She stared me in the face, looking as noble as ever human being looked. "If we do not meet alone again, good-bye!" And as she spoke the dinner gong sounded, and Mr. Beaufoy and Plöwitz came in talking, and in a minute more we were seated at the dinner table.

After dinner, not being invited by Mr. Beaufoy to join him, I adjourned to the drawing-room, not knowing what to think or expect after the previous scene. The room was to my great relief empty. In the midst of a course of sombre and anxious thought, in which, man-like, I could

not avoid some self-reproach for a possible wrong done to a woman who had put herself in my power, the Basilisk came into the room.

"Mr. Coplestone," she said in her softest tone, "my father would like to speak to you in his study. I am going to bed. Good-night!"

And as I in melting mood clasped her hand, she rapidly raised mine to her lips, and then with a strange flash in her eyes left the room.

I went to Mr. Beaufoy's study, feeling absurdly like a schoolboy about to interview involuntarily the head-master. Mr. Beaufoy was sitting at his writing table, in the chaste light of a shaded reading-lamp.

"Sit down, Mr. Coplestone," he began, in the tone of a man who had thoroughly realised just what he wanted to say.

I took the nearest chair, which was at some distance from the zone of light thrown by the lamp. In truth I was sufficiently agitated by the recent interview to wish to avoid very close inspection from the unsympathetic eyes of the benevolent coiner.

"Not there, Mr. Coplestone—not there!" he said, with flattering *bonhomie*. "Take the armchair opposite to me."

The chair indicated was a wooden armchair, of distinctly early English and uninviting aspect. But as my host, with iron-grey smile, indicated it with his blanched forefinger,

and rose to guide me to it, all choice was taken from me, and I received a wholesome reminder that I need not admit everyone into the secret of my recovered sight.

Mr. Beaufoy began to speak, and as he spoke he played somewhat nervously with an article on his writing-table, which looked something like a closed spring ink-bottle.

"I am sorry to have to send for you on the subject which I must broach," he began. "You are aware, of course, that Miss Fortescue, for whose musical education we have found you so satisfactory a guide, is away, and, I fear, likely for some time to remain away. Under the circumstances, my dear Coplestone, I do not think I am justified, with regard to you as much as to myself, in retaining your valuable services any longer."

"I have felt that myself, Mr. Beaufoy," I interpolated, "and, in fact, have told Miss Beaufoy so before."

"I am aware of it, Mr. Coplestone, and it is only what I should have expected of you. Now I have some influence, and I need not, I hope, say"—how very nervous he seemed to be getting, and how his hand trembled about the ink-bottle—"that anything I can do I will gladly do to get you a quiet, safe, and comfortable situation."

I bowed and thanked him.

"Do not thank me. It is only what you well deserve. I hope you have been comfortable here?"

"I have had much to be very thankful for here," I

answered, beginning to think it was too good for truth that I was to be sent away unharmed, at liberty to take what steps I thought fit to unravel the mysteries of Hanover Lodge.

"Has Hardy been attentive to you?" he asked suddenly.

I gave a start, and in vain endeavoured to conceal the traces of agitation on my face at the unexpected mention of the murdered man.

"Good," he said curtly. "You would like to see Hardy before you go."

And while I wondered again whether I had not been the victim of a hideous ocular illusion, he smote with violence upon the knob on the table.

The chair in which I was seated tipped up. I clutched wildly, vainly at the air, and, with a crash, fell into vacancy.

* * * * *

Where am I? What has happened? I am in pitchy darkness. The air is heavy, and damp, and earthy. I stretch out my hands; they grasp soft mould. My head aches, my hands tremble. My God! am I buried alive?

CHAPTER XXIII.

TRAPPED AND TRAPPED AGAIN.

BURIED alive! The overwhelming horror of this idea had the effect of thoroughly recalling my scattered senses. I remembered going to Mr. Beaufoy's study, the interview, and the sudden fall into insensibility and darkness. The chair to which Mr. Beaufoy had, with marked persistence, invited me, was a trap; doubtless he imagined a trap of death.

I raised myself, at first with some pain and difficulty, and endeavoured to look about me. The darkness, however, was too thick to allow of my getting any idea of the depth I had fallen, or of the nature of my prison. I ascertained, however, that I had fallen upon a heap of loose mould, which seemed to have recently been thrown up, and which had certainly saved my bones, if not my life, for all about I felt the hard surface of a concrete floor.

In my pocket was a box of wax matches. I remembered it with joy, and was on the point of striking a light to relieve the horror of the unknown darkness, when sud-

denly the imprudence of such a course occurred to me forcibly.

Whatever happened, or whatever might be intended to happen, it was certain that my fate would be further enquired into, and in the desperate circumstances in which I was now placed, it was not my cue to give any sign of life, or to prepare my enemies for any further opposition or resistance. I carefully replaced the matchbox in my pocket deriving a distinct comfort from the sense of power which the possession of the means of securing a light conferred upon me. And so for a while I sat upon the heap of mould in the darkness.

After a while the inaction became insupportable, and the darkness and silence began to play fantastic tricks with eye and ear, until at length I could no longer withstand the craving for light.

I struck a match, and in a moment all imaginary terrors were dispersed. The clear flame of the wax vesta disclosed a spacious cellar or vault, with well-bricked sides and concrete floor. At one end was a door, which I examined, and found to be locked. Over the spot where I had fallen I could dimly make out the machinery of the spring trap-door, through which I had been so suddenly precipitated into captivity. The earth upon which I had fallen was newly-turned. In shape and disposition it recalled the idea of a newly-filled grave.

I started back with a feeling of superstitious terror. This must be Hardy's grave! And even at that moment a feeling of reassurance filled my spirit. If my surmise were correct, this grave had saved me from injury. I should be spared yet to bring this murderous household to account. But meantime? How to act? And what were the intentions of my enemies? Again I struck a light and carefully examined the cellar-door. It had little in common with the heavy ill-hung door, such as I had been accustomed to in my childhood's home, whose fastenings were as ponderous as they were ineffective. This door seemed massive and heavy enough, but it fitted closely, was polished and new in appearance, and scarcely rattled at all in answer to my emphatic, though guarded attacks. I returned in a despondent frame to the spot where I had fallen, and new horrors began to crowd in upon my mind. Mary was now defenceless, and I—I was even more so. Did they mean to leave me here to starve? It was not impossible. Or would the stealthy assassin—who had already, in intention, slain me—come upon me, enfeebled and unarmed, and consult at once his malice and his security?

If he would only come soon—soon, while my strength was unimpaired; soon, while my spirit was unbroken. Armed or unarmed, alone or with his miscreant creatures at his back, I would give a good account of Herr Professor Plöwitz before he sent me to my own.

Ha! Is it fancy? Is it the blood surging and throbbing in my temples that make those streaks of light visible afar? No; it is real light shining more and more clearly in the darkness through the crevices of the door. The stillness is broken by the sound of the turning lock, and as I sink back upon the heap of mould, a figure appears at the door, throwing the light of the lamp into the cellar, and shading his face with his hand. Who is it? Satisfied, seemingly, with my immobility, he turns the key in the lock, and, with the key-ring on his finger, advances into the cellar. It is not Plöwitz; no, it is Mr. Beaufoy. I lie as still as death, and yet between my half-closed eyelids I watch his approach. He slips the keys into his pocket, and then I see a something shining in his hand, glittering now and again as the rays of the lamp fell upon it. It is a long dagger, and over his arm hangs a long cord!

He stands looking at me. Calm, precise, not without some traces of benevolence, he stands with lamp in one hand, and dagger in the other, contemplating the man whose death he has already essayed to compass, and which he has now come to assure. Like the picture of the scientific man in "Vivisection," Mr. Beaufoy calmly and thoughtfully regarded me. I kept down as well as I could the wild throbbing of my heart, repressed the impatient promptings of revenge. He was satisfied at length with an inspection that seemed to me interminable.

"Not killed," he said softly. "Tut, tut, tut! Fancy our having dug Hardy's grave so immediately under the trap-door! That was Plöwitz's fault. Plöwitz is always wrong when he allows himself to be in a hurry. Well, my poor designing friend, a cut throat will keep you as quiet as a broken neck."

So saying, he put the lamp down upon the ground. As he did so, and the shadows rapidly changed, I moved quickly, to be ready for a spring. And in a moment, before he had time to recover his upright position, I had seized him, thrown him heavily to the floor, and was kneeling upon his arms, while the knife, which had dropped from his hand at my sudden assault, was now quivering at his throat in mine.

Had I been kneeling over his corpse no change of complexion would have been requisite. His face was ashy-white, his lips leaden, and, though I knelt with no light weight upon him, it was fright rather than pain that caused him to gasp so painfully.

"Now, you murderous villain," I said, "I shall tie you here, and leave you while I bring the authorities to enquire into the cause of Hardy's death."

At this he became a trifle more livid, if possible, but made no attempt to speak.

"If you make any resistance," I went on, "I will stick this dagger into your throat; you understand?"

He evidently did understand, for, though I exercised great caution, he gave no signs of activity to justify it.

I bound him with severe compression, with the cords he had brought himself into the cellar. I gagged him effectively, and having made his fastenings doubly secure, I set him in the midst of Hardy's grave, and, taking with me his dagger and the bunch of keys, I extinguished the light and left the vault, locking its owner in.

Two more doors I had to open—one at the foot of a flight of stairs, the other at the top, but the key was apparently a master-key, and all doors yielded to it. Unobserved I emerged into the passage, and hastily and safely reached my own room.

Ere I had time to collect myself, a knock came at the door.

"Who is there?"

"If you please, sir, let me in for a minute," said a woman's voice, which sounded like Mrs. Hardy's.

"Who is it?"

"Mrs. Hardy, sir."

I had no reason to doubt the woman, and I opened the door. She was alone, and seemed considerably agitated.

"Oh, sir, Miss Mary! They're going to send her away."

"Away! Where?"

"To the Continent, sir—to Germany. I said I'd help

you, sir, but if you once let her go you'll never see her again."

"When is this to be?"

"This very night."

"Who is going to take her?"

"That Plöwitz. She is to be taken away from here in a carriage as an invalid, and if you can't stop or follow the carriage it will be all up, for I don't know which way they are going; and you must mind what you do, for there's a telephone from the house to the lodge, and Grimes he wouldn't stick at nothing, no more than my poor man would."

I had no time to form any plan. My only idea was to follow the carriage by any means unobserved by the enemy, until I could call for assistance in some public place.

"Miss Mary sent you this, sir," said Mrs. Hardy, holding out a small and crumpled piece of notepaper.

On it was faintly pencilled:

"*They are going to carry me away to-night. For God's sake, save me!*"

I pressed the note to my lips, and glanced with satisfaction at the long shining blade of the captured dagger. For stabbing Plöwitz, or cutting the traces, that knife would be equally useful.

A slight cry from Mrs. Hardy caused me to look up,

and I met the gaze of Plöwitz himself. He looked pale, mocking, malicious.

"Mrs. Hardy," he said, "you are scarcely discreet. Didn't you know what a dangerous young man this is, who pretends he cannot see, and yet keeps his eyes so wide open. Go!"

Mrs. Hardy, with a look of caution at me quickly disappeared.

"I will keep my eyes open now, Herr Plöwitz," I answered hastily; "and I will not shut them till I see Miss Fortescue in a place of safety, where she will be in no danger from bullies and kidnappers!"

"Mr. Coplestone, you are very mad—very mad indeed. Mrs. Hardy has been gossiping, I suppose?"

"She has told me that Miss Fortescue is going to be carried off to-night."

"Carried off! And suppose that Miss Fortescue is about to leave England, may I ask, dear Coplestone, what the devil that has got to do with you?"

"You may know, and you shall know. It has everything to do with me, because I choose to forbid it"—he smiled like a Chinaman—"and I forbid it because she has appealed to me for protection!" And I showed him the little note.

He became paler still.

"You forget your position here," he said quite calmly.

"You are dismissed, and I believe, between ourselves, that you will be prosecuted for obtaining your situation here under false pretences. I could not allow my *fiancée* to be under any obligation to a swindler!"

I strode up to him. I gloated over him for a moment I raised my arm. I saw a strange look of fear in his hateful face. He sprang back, and shouted for help. Full between the eyes he should have it. The look of fear gave way to a sudden gleam of relief, and I was nearly strangled by a strong hard arm thrown round my neck from behind. The blow fell harmless on the air, and in a second I was securely pinioned. Then I was blindfolded, and bound, without seeing anything of my aggressors.

My doubts were solved to some extent by the Basilisk's voice saying, in the tone of the housewife giving directions for the bestowal of furniture: "Take him to the north tower!" I was carried up and down several short flights of steps, and along passages, and then up some twenty steps. A door was unlocked. I was carried into a room, laid helpless upon a bed, the door was double-locked upon me, and I was once more a prisoner.

CHAPTER XXIV.

IN THE NORTH TOWER.

Bound, blindfolded, imprisoned! Mary Fortescue helpless in the hands of her oppressors! Such were the thoughts which with maddening pertinacity beat in upon my brain as I lay helplessly straining at the cords that bound me. I was weak and unnerved, and the very exigency of the circumstances, instead of conferring unwonted power upon me, seemed to paralyse me, laying a crushing weight upon my efforts, and, for a time, upon my will.

After a period of fruitless and fatiguing effort to loosen the cords with which I was bound, I called what patience I could command—the patience of dire necessity—to my aid, and, encouraged by the reflection that I was at any rate husbanding my strength, I lay still, and endeavoured to reflect calmly upon my position.

My own fate did not trouble me greatly. Two attempts had been made upon my life, and it was evident enough that in that house of secret ways and means, of unscrupulous resource and unscrupulous devotion, no security for my own safety could be obtained, save by flight, and that security seemed sufficiently unattain-

able. But the agony of the situation lay in the imminent danger to which Mary was exposed. The words of her note, the heartrending appeal of that little bitter-sweet cry for help, burned before my blinded eyes in the darkness. Carried off to the Continent in the power, possibly under the conduct, of Plöwitz! What worse fate could I fear for her? As I lay revolving the horrible condition of affairs, nearly maddened by the conflict of love, and fear, and rage, and resentment, I heard distinctly the sound of wheels on the gravel somewhere below. Doubtless the carriage, come to take her away. The sound revived my benumbed energies. I writhed and wrestled with my bonds all ineffectually. The cords cut me, the sweat stood large upon my forehead. In my struggles I pictured the scene which was being enacted below—the face of Mary, pale, shrinking, looking in vain for the help which could not come. Plöwitz odiously polite, or possibly, in an extreme case, odiously insolent. The ruffianly guardian, who had robbed his ward, and was now an active agent in her abduction—the pale beautiful face of that unwomanly woman, the evil genius of the poor girl against whom I could imagine no woman's heart being steeled—with terrible vividness imagination painted the events in which I was powerless to intervene, the more terribly as I knew from experience that fancy was responsible for none of the terrors that I realised.

Hark! Again the sound of wheels—unmistakable, though distant, as if muffled by an intervening angle of the house; louder for a moment, then diminishing in distinctness, as of a carriage rapidly driving away. She was gone! Beyond question she was gone.

Was it fancy that seemed to show a loosening of the cords that bound me? No! My struggles had had some effect at last. At last the rigour of my bondgae was relaxed! I ceased my struggles again to recover energy for a fresh effort. Carefully—fearfully, I again essay to set myself free. Thank God, the cords are loosened! With care and patience I now set about the task of recovering the freedom of my limbs. Soon I am rewarded, and sooner than I dared to hope. I have got one arm free. In feverish haste I am about to set to work on the other cords, when I hear a step at the door, and a hand upon the lock. Quickly I entangled the released arm with its cast-off fastenings, and place it under me. Then the door is opened, and a step advances into the room. The bandage over my eyes is not so deftly fastened that I cannot make out the presence of a light. It is brought close to me, and a rustle of a dress tells me that my visitor is a woman.

"Who is it?" I ask.

"Your gaoler, Mr. Coplestone," says the voice of the Basilisk.

"Why am I here?"

"It is for your safety. My father and Herr Plöwitz are your enemies. You have not acted with discretion, Mr. Coplestone."

There was an unwarranted touch of sarcasm in the way she spoke which angered me.

"How can I act with discretion here? What is discretion in a house of mystery and cruelty like this?"

"Discretion here, as elsewhere, is to know one's friends," she said.

"Are you my friend?"

"You should have known that long ago."

"Then why am I treated thus?"

"I have told you—it is for your safety."

"It is for my safety that I am blindfolded, as well as bound?"

"It was better so. But there is no need for it now. I will take off the bandage from your eyes, if you will give me a little gratitude."

"I will give you no gratitude. What have they done with Mary?"

"Really, Mr. Coplestone, you are given to forgetting your position here. Miss Fortescue has gone away; but she did not desire me to inform you of her movements."

She said this with icy coldness, and was moving away. Suddenly she returned. She stooped over me, and took off the covering from my eyes. Then I saw her, pale and

beautiful, gazing down into my face with an expression at once haughty and beseeching, ready to assume either look entirely.

I gazed silently at her. Certainly she was very lovely.

"You are in my power now," she said at last. "I love to have people in my power, and—" here she looked curiously threatening—"I love you!"

"Then let me go. I shall go mad if I am kept here while she is in danger. Forgive me!" for she looked pained, and flushed a deep red for a moment, "I am in your power in a way, but I did not wish you to put yourself in mine. I will forget all if you will set me free."

"You shall go free," she laughed, quite changed again; "but you won't find her, if by 'her' you mean my cousin; and if you do, it won't be much satisfaction, for Herr Plöwitz will not approve of gentlemen, even blind ones, dangling round his wife."

"When shall I be free?"

"To-morrow morning."

"You promise?"

"I promise. There is no great reason why I should consult your wishes, but you shall go to-morrow."

And with that she turned and went away, pale again and majestic as a Grecian statue.

To-morrow! I felt that if it depended on the Basilisk I should never be free again. I should never leave Hanover

Lodge alive. I had read that in her face, in her tones, when I had disregarded her avowal of passion.

I speedily set to work and liberated my other arm, and speedily cast off the bonds from my feet, and stood free, as far as my limbs were concerned, upon the floor of the room.

To the window! It was high in the wall, but easy enough to get up to, even without the chair which, in my cramped condition, I had recourse to. By the fitful light of the moon, which showed at uncertain intervals as the clouds slowly travelled along the sky, I could see that I was at a height of about fifty feet from the ground. Just round one corner of the tower I could see a thick growth of ivy, but it was quite out of my reach; and even if I could reach it, I could not dare to trust my weight to it, running the risk of tearing a mass of it from its uncertain hold on the wall, and falling, stunned and helpless, a prey to my enemies at its foot. There was no time to be lost, however. The cords with which I had been bound! No use. They were of no appreciable length for such a distance as I had to descend. The bedclothes held out a better hope. With the help of a small pocket-knife I managed with much trouble to tear the bedding into broad strips—ample for my purpose—and with feverish haste, yet very heedfully, as one who knew that not his own life only but the safety of another rested, perhaps, in every knot, I made a long rope and fastened one

end of it securely to the iron bedstead. I tugged at it, and tried it with might and main. Every length stood the utmost test I could impose upon it. Then I lowered it carefully out of the window. There was no key in the inside of the door, but I piled across it such articles of furniture as I could move without making much noise ; and, having constructed a pretty substantial barricade, I mounted the window-sill, and prepared to trust myself to the rope that I had made. It is a simple matter to read about, and I had often taken it, in stories, as a simple matter of course, that escaping by means of a rope of bedding was as easy as any other form of exit. But when with muscles which had had no exercise for a long period I grasped the homely ladder and glanced from the solid safety of the dark room to the whispering abyss below, which the flimsy-looking rope pierced for some distance like a flickering light, I felt a strange reluctance to commit myself to the work of my hands. There was no time for hesitation, however, the thought of Mary in the power of Plöwitz banished all my momentary fears, and with a firm clasp of the blanket I let my feet go, seeking the foot-hold of the nearest knot. Once under weigh, it seemed safe and simple enough, but ere I had got two of my own lengths down the rope, I heard the click of the lock above, the jar of the door sharply opened, and the crash of the falling furniture. Speeding my descent too much, I miscalculated the length of the drop, and, letting

go too soon, fell heavily a considerable distance to the ground. As I picked myself up, shaken and bruised, I heard from the window above me a singularly shrill whistle, and as I set off running as hard as a damaged foot would allow me, there came a distant answering note, which told me that the alarm was taken, in the direction of the Lodge.

CHAPTER XXV.

A DESPERATE DEVICE.

It is strange, but true, that, as I set off running, I felt a sense of positive delight in at last meeting my enemies on straightforward, if not on equal, terms. Equal they certainly were not, for I was unarmed, not well acquainted with the ground, and considerably out of condition from the long and enforced inactivity of the last four years; while my enemies were on their own ground, unscrupulous, as I too well knew, and aware that their liberty, their lives in all probability, depended upon my capture; and that now meant, I was convinced, my death.

I ran rashly, buoyantly, at top-speed across the lawn, as I imagined; but the unaccustomed quarter from which I had started, confused me; the thick masses of cloud, which kept on remorselessly devouring with dense blackness the dazzling mother-o'-pearl edges with which the slighted moon sought to beautify her defeat, had rolled up an impenetrable barrier of mysterious darkness.

I stumbled and tripped, and ere long, with dismay,

tinged with a sense of the ridiculous, plunged head foremost into thick bushes, whose pliant branches flipped my face, while the heavy autumn dew fell in a shower all about me. I picked myself up, half laughing at so ridiculous a mishap in so serious a crisis. I looked anxiously about me. Those who have never experienced what it is to be absolutely deprived of one's bearings, even in a familiar spot, will have, perhaps, some difficulty in realising the perplexing nature of my position. It is by no means given to every man to carry about a self-acting compass in his internal consciousness, as a thick London fog in a suburban district has shown to many clear-headed inhabitants of Greater London. Ridiculous as it may seem, when I had gazed about me, and to some extent recovered from the shock of my two falls, I could come to no other conclusion than that I was practically lost. I had set off running upon instinct. I fully imagined that I had struck across the lawn and was making for the drive, which would have shown me the road to safety, whatever precautions I might have been driven to adopt by the way. But having landed myself in some unknown bushes, I was fairly at a loss on extricating myself. The sky was dark, the earth was shrouded in dead blackness. I could dimly make out in only one quarter the looming outline of a big tree. This was no guide whatever. No tree that I had seen by daylight near Hanover Lodge had a tithe of the vague vastness,

the mysterious majesty of the tree that had expanded in the darkness, and assimilated the infinity of night.

I stood collecting all my senses in this supreme need.

Help came from the enemy.

A whistle, such as I had heard as I dropped from my prison, drew my attention to one quarter of the darkness, which, from that moment, was no longer without form and void. I gazed steadily. Then there became visible a dull light, as of a lamp behind a thick and partially drawn blind. This was better than nothing, but it told me little. There surely, was the house, but from what side or angle of the house did that blurred light shine ?

I still waited. Nothing was to be gained by a run in the dark. I waited, feeling more keenly than ever, now that the excitement of the first futile rush was over, the desperation of my position—the fate that awaited me if captured.

Suddenly I became aware of a dissipation of the darkness. Was it only the effect of anxious straining of the sight in the unresponsive medium? No. The form of the clouds was again becoming apparent. Their bastioned outlines again assumed significance. Suddenly—more suddenly than I had dared to hope—the dim and muffled moonlight renewed the time of action for me and for my pursuers. I perceived that my general idea had been correct, but that I had failed to allow for the circular form of

the lawn. Once more I set out, but, when I was well out of cover of the shrubs, I suddenly saw, within a few yards of me, the form of a man dart apparently from the bushes. He came straight towards me. To hesitate was to be lost. I changed my course. I ran at him. I remembered some of the football lore of all times, and I laid him low with a hack which would have reduced his usefulness in any match for the next week. The loud cry of "Help!" which he uttered as I closed with him told me that it was Mr. Beaufoy whom I had laid low. Almost immediately thick darkness again took possession of the scene. The light had disappeared from the house. I proceeded with caution, but, confused by the collision and the sudden change of direction, I was again at a loss in which direction to proceed. I cautiously made my way, to the best of my ability, towards the bushes, thinking that it would be safest to follow the line of the boundary, in order to leave me cover if the moon should shine brightly and give my pursuers a chance. And yet I would rather have had light and an idea which way to go than enjoy the horrible security of the darkness. The railway was my great idea. If I could reach the bridge and get down by the bank upon the line I might be saved. But which way was the bridge? Suddenly there broke upon my ear the scream of a distant railway-whistle. As if in mockery of its promise of guidance and future safety it was echoed by the fell sound of that

whistle from the house which was rallying the bloodhounds upon my track. No matter. There was the suggestion of life, of traffic, of the wholesome world outside. And more—as the prolonged railway-whistle grew rapidly louder, I saw in the distance the bright light of the steam illuminated by the fire through the open door of the engine-furnace, and with its shrill call of triumph and its floating banner of fire the night train sped rapidly on its way. With my arm held out to guard my face, if I should run against bushes or trees, I set off at a round pace towards the bridge.

Luckily for me my course was no easy one. I made slow progress, hampered by stumbles and the difficulties of keeping a correct line. At last I struck the road. A wave of indescribable joy filled my heart as I felt the gravel under my feet, and against the clearing sky recognised the cloud-like tree-tops of the avenue. But as my feet crunched on the loose gravel, the moon shone out in full splendour, and there was a shout of harsh triumph behind me.

Ah! had I had but a weapon, I would have stood at bay and given good account of myself to the bloodthirsty wolves who were hunting me. But I was defenceless, and a sudden thought of Mary, perhaps even now on the sea with Plöwitz, turned all my energies again to making good my escape. I ran as fast as I could towards the bridge.

I kept well away from my pursuers. I reached the bridge. I sought the end of the parapet. Ah, I had forgotten, if I had ever realised! A thick hedge, and a tall paling, thickly studded with nails, guarded the ends.

I could hear in the stillness the steps of my pursuers rapidly approaching. I heard their shrill and menacing whistle answered—good Heavens!—answered close by from the side of the bridge. Grimes must be hurrying up from the lodge! I was caught as in a trap upon that narrow way. Hark! Another whistle. But this is the whistle of a train. With startling distinctness I hear the click of a distant signal and see the white light at the beginning of the curve turn to a sudden red. *There is a nearing roll of wheels, a discordant jingling and jolting, a roaring of steam, and as at each end of the bridge appear the figures of those who seek my life, the train beneath has halted half-way through.*

Saved! saved! I vault upon the parapet. I shake my fist, and throw a curse to the murderous ruffians, and drop, with what care I may, upon the waggon beneath me. The tarpaulin covering yields to my weight. I am uninjured. The figures of my foes appear in confusion against the sky-line. Another click and the red eye of the signal-lamp turns to a vivid green; a short whistle, a succession of jolts, and we are speeding away towards Euston—towards safety—towards Mary!

CHAPTER XXVI.

ON THE TRACK.

FASTER and faster the train went on, leaving my baffled pursuers gesticulating in impotent rage and confusion upon the bridge, which they had regarded as the certain trap for my life. I had fallen, fortunately, upon a truck which was laden with some comparatively soft goods—bales of some sort, I judged—and the tarpaulin covering which was stretched over them served to break in some measure the force of my fall. I was safe—free ! The exquisite sense of relief which this reflection brought with it was checked almost instantaneously by the thought of the terrible difficulties which interposed to hinder the release of Mary from the clutches of Plöwitz. All I knew was that he was ostensibly going to Pyrmont. But was that likely to be true ? Why should I believe what the Basilisk had told me ? To be sure, she had no idea then that I should so soon be at liberty. It was possible, therefore, that, with a taste for the infliction of fine torture, she had given me the real destination of the travellers, enjoying the helplessness which she believed would render the knowledge of no

avail to me. Yes, it was at least highly probable that they really were bound for Pyrmont, and this thought cheered me and heartened me again.

I now had time to reflect upon my own position. However desperate my previous plight, the sense of safety brought with it the thought of the ordinary everyday world to which I was returning, and I remembered that if I were discovered by the railway authorities, delay, inquiries, and publicity would in all likelihood ensue. These I was anxious to avoid. Nor did I relish the idea of appearing the centre of a critical crowd of porters and labourers, in my present guise—in evening-dress and without a hat. We were approaching a station. The signals gave the line clear, and we ran through at a fair pace. I could see the name on the lamps of the platform, and this brought back to my mind the one obvious haven of immediate refuge, if I could escape from the train unobserved, the safe reference to avoid delay if I were discovered—St. Bartimeus's Home, and Dr. Shaw. The station I recognised by name as being one from which visitors used often to come to the Home on the occasion of our concerts.

As I ran my plans over, the engine gave a loud whistle, and almost immediately the train slackened speed. I looked ahead, and saw the red lamp on a near signal-post fixed against us. Would the train stop? No. The colour changed, and, with a short whistle as if of acknowledgment,

the engine began to puff heavily again. A station was close ahead. Again we slackened. The signal there was against us. There were numerous lights of houses and lamps to be seen around. We were well in the inhabited region of the north-western suburbs. If the train slackened sufficiently to enable me to descend with safety I resolved to attempt it. This time there was no relenting in the glare of the red eye that was stopping our progress. Slower and slower got the pace. I looked heedfully about. No one was in sight, except at some distance in front, on the station-platform. I dropped from the truck, and keeping under cover, managed to reach the side of the line unobserved. Walking a little distance, I came to a practicable gap in the hedge which lined the railway, and stood at last upon the road. At some little distance I saw the entrance to the station and, to my great relief, discovered several cabs waiting. Brushing myself as well as I could, to remove some of the most evident traces of my recent adventures, I went along the road and gained the portico of the station unobserved.

My shout of "Hansom!" and my appearance seemed to cause considerable astonishment to the two drivers who, not expecting any fare till the arrival of the train which they were awaiting, were engaged in an engrossing conversation with two or three friends in front of the brightly lighted station hotel on the other side of the way. My

condition, however, was no concern of the driver's, and, though I had no doubt that he took a mental note of all the circumstances in view of future enquiries by the police for anyone answering to my description, he simply gathered up the reins, and drove off towards St. Bartimeus's. It was getting on for eleven o'clock when we arrived there. There was a light in one or two of the windows still. Shaw, I remembered, was never very early at night.

I rang the bell, and waited a short time. Probably the servants had gone to bed. Then I heard the sound of slippered feet coming across the hall, the door was opened, and I stood face to face with Shaw himself.

"Coplestone!"

I never saw or imagined more surprise in any face than that which was expressed in Dr. Shaw's, which I now beheld for the first time.

"Good Heavens! what has happened?" he went on, dragging me in, and leaving the door open in his astonishment

"A great deal has happened," I began. "And I want your help at once."

"My dear fellow," he said warmly, grasping my hand with one of his, and slamming the door with the other, "you shall have it. Come into my study. Why, what's the matter with your eyes? You are not blind!"

"No, thank God, I am not! If I were, I should not be

in a position to ask your help in preventing one crime, in exposing and punishing others."

Shaw, over whose face all manner of expressions had been rapidly flitting, as he took me for a ghost, a lunatic, or a drunkard, was apparently quite convinced by my tone. He assumed only an expression of keen interest, and listened to my story with grave professional air.

It was no easy matter to tell the story calmly, consecutively. The task was rendered the more difficult by the fact that Mary's danger, so plain and so agonising to me, seemed at first to make less impression upon Dr. Shaw than the dark crimes which I narrated without feeling such a sense of their gravity, as my listener, who had never seen Mary Fortescue, never realised her strange helplessness never felt the quickening inspiration of her timid love.

One thing gratified me as I told the tale. Shaw was evidently profoundly interested and impressed by the strange manner in which my sight had been restored. But he forbore questioning me, seeing how intensely concerned I was to come to the point which had brought me to seek his help ; and very soon I saw that, far from condemning the deception I had practised on the household of Hanover Lodge with regard to my recovery, he looked upon it as a legitmate weapon used in a commendable war.

"And now, doctor," I said as I finished a rapid account of the memorable period of my sojourn with the Beaufoys,

"what is to be done? How can we stop Plöwitz? How can we trace him?"

The doctor had risen, and I saw that he was about to put on his boots.

"We must not lose any time," he said briskly. "We must communicate with the police at once. There are still several trains to Euston. We must catch one as soon as possible."

Leaving a note on the table, explaining that he was imperatively called away, but would be back early in the morning, he turned out the lights, and we were soon striding briskly along towards the nearest station.

A walk of a quarter of a mile brought us there; and in a few minutes I was speeding towards Euston once more, provided this time with a hat and overcoat of the good doctor's. A cab, whose pace endangered our safety and that of some of the foot-passengers, brought us, all too slowly, to Scotland Yard.

After a certain amount of parleying, in which I left everything to my companion, we were ushered into the presence of an official—a broad-shouldered, square-headed gentleman, with very piercing eyes, and an uncommonly pleasant expression of countenance.

This was Chief Inspector Rosebush, the redoubtable puller of the strings, which brought many and many a criminal, who had almost struggled free of the fatal consequences of his

misdeeds, back into the throttling meshes which Nemesis spreads for the breakers of laws. I looked at him not only with curiosity and some admiration, but with a touch of romantic interest. Here was my hope, under Heaven, of rescuing an innocent girl from the power of a villain—of recovering my love, of safeguarding her from the wiles of her enemies.

Mr. Rosebush listened with a perfectly impassive face, while Shaw, also professionally impassive, put before him with admirable succinctness the main features of the case. Now and then he turned his piercing eyes upon me, and put some simple but pertinent question. My answers to these occasional enquiries were all that I contributed to the conversation in which I was so deeply interested. Dr. Shaw for the present omitted to relate circumstantially the story of Hardy's murder.

Occasionally interruptions came from the telephone which was close at hand. Then the inspector, courteously raising his hand to bespeak our indulgence, would listen to the murmured message from afar, and sometimes immediately, sometimes after a moment's thought, would consign to the machine the words that often meant the doom of the hardly-hunted quarry of justice. His instructions given, he leaned forward again in his customary attitude of courteous attention.

"Hanover Lodge!" he said at last. "This must all be

seen to." And then he proceeded to detail some instructions to an invisible myrmidon by means of the telephone.

"Pardon me," I said, rather agitated by his calmness, "but Hanover Lodge can wait, and in the meantime every minute is valuable to prevent the escape of Plöwitz."

"We shall be in time for him," said the inspector reassuringly. According to your impression of the time they left Hanover Lodge, they could not have been able to catch any of the night-boats for the Continent. By the time the morning-boats start, all the ports will be watched, and if they attempt to cross we shall know of it at once. We must first ascertain whether they left London by any night-train."

"How can you do that if they are already gone?" I asked, somewhat irritated by his coolness.

He smiled, as a head-master will sometimes smile from his unapproachable height upon a small boy who has betrayed a doubt of magisterial omniscience, and said—

"We always have people watching, and they acquire a habit of observing, even if they do not see the persons they are looking for. No doubt we shall hear something of Mr. Plöwitz if he has left town by any night-train."

There was a minute of silence, of thought. Then the clear incisive voice of the inspector was heard again:

"Pyrmont, you say, is thought to be their destination?"

I repeated my grounds both for believing and doubting the truth of the Basilisk's statement.

"It is quite possible," said Rosebush. He rose and took down an album from a press in the wall. "Pyrmont! There is a gentleman who is connected with Pyrmont for whom we have been keeping a sharp lookout for some time. This book contains the photographs of a number of people who are very much wanted here. That is Flimsy the great banknote-forger; there's the man who is wanted for the Charing Cross murder; and there's a man who is as much sought for in Germany as he is in England—Otto Blitz, the coiner."

The thin, nervous finger of the inspector hid the face from my sight. But as he raised it I gave a cry of astonishment, of delight. I seized Rosebush by the arm.

"That is the man! That's the man! He left Hanover Lodge a few hours ago!"

The impassive inspector suddenly flashed into enthusiasm. It was evidently great news for him.

"Look again!" he cried. "Be sure!"

"That," I said deliberately, "is the man Plöwitz, who left Hanover Lodge with Miss Fortescue this very night."

CHAPTER XXVII.

BY CHANCE.

"THE man Plöwitz," said Inspector Rosebush, "shall be looked after."

"Do you think you will be able to catch him?" I asked.

"My dear sir," returned the inspector, "what we *think* we can do, and what we manage to do, are not precisely the same affairs. If human ingenuity, combined with human common-sense, can stop the career of Plöwitz *alias* Blitz, it will be brought to a close very speedily."

"And Mary Fortescue—what of her?"

Inspector Rosebush smiled.

"Miss Mary Fortescue," he said, "will, if I am not mistaken, be our bait to catch our fish."

"But," I exclaimed, "you have not got the bait."

"True," he replied; "but, if the bait can be procured, the fish shall be caught. Till to-morrow morning, at, say, eleven," he added. "Then I shall be better able to make my meaning plainer."

I took the hint, and after Shaw and I had wished the

worthy official good-night, we strolled up Whitehall, my head bursting with conflicting ideas, my heart full of anxiety as to the fate of her who was my only thought in this weary conflict of crime. Shaw was careful not to interrupt the silence, which he evidently knew I was incapable of breaking. We had passed the Grand Hotel, and were approaching Charing Cross railway-station, when a hansom blocked our progress as we attempted to cross the street. The light of a gas-lamp fell right across the occupant of the cab—a female thickly veiled. Yet, as my eyes fell upon her, as the hansom went swiftly on its way, I clutched Shaw by the arm, and almost fell on the pavement. I had recognised her. It was the Basilisk. Few could have known Miss Beaufoy—I should not myself, but that *she* recognised *me*. It was the quick flash of her magnificent eyes through the meshes of the veil, which revealed to me that this woman in black was none other than the imperious mistress of Hanover Lodge. The attraction may have been magnetic, it was certainly effective. I had time to notice a black bag with a white band on the roof of the cab before it was whirled away eastward.

"What on earth is the matter?" asked Shaw.

I could only gasp, "She—the Basilisk!" as I pointed after the fleeting hansom.

"My dear fellow," replied the doctor, "you are letting

your fancies run away with you. At the present moment both the amiable lady (whom you call the Basilisk) and her excellent father (our patron) are no doubt safe in the hands of the police. You have no more seen Miss Beaufoy than I hâve clapped eyes on her parent."

"I tell you I am *not* mistaken," said I almost fiercely; "that woman was the Basilisk—she can tell me where I can find Mary Fortescue—she can——"

"What you can't do," interrupted Shaw, "is either to put me out of temper or to make me believe that this apparition was anything more real than the outcome of a temporarily disordered brain. Come home with me."

He hailed a cab, into which I somewhat sulkily stepped, for I knew that I was right and that he was wrong. Shaw increased my irritation during the drive by persistently whistling the most vulgar of music-hall tunes. When a man's nerves are disturbed, nothing grates upon his sensibility more than a popular accompaniment to his woes. I felt I could have strangled Shaw for his unmelodious reminiscences; and when he piped "What cheer, 'Riah?" as we stopped at the gates of St. Bartimeus's Home, I inwardly recorded the fact that medical men are as callous to mental suffering, as they are to physical pain.

As we descended from the vehicle, the sleepy porter came forward.

"A note for you, sir," he said, touching his cap, as he

gave an envelope to Shaw. The doctor tore the cover open, read the missive, and handed it to me, while the clock of a neighbouring church chimed three.

This is what I read:

"*A friend tells Dr. Shaw that he should say to Mister Coplestone the way is Harritch. Miss B. have gone.*"

"Who left this?" I asked excitedly.

"A elderly female," replied the porter; "about a hour ago. She rung me hup," he added, with an aggrieved expression.

"The way is Harritch!" I repeated. "What can that mean?"

"It means," said Shaw, "that we are on the track; it means that you have a friend at court; it means that Plöwitz has attempted to carry off Mary to Belgium by way of the Great Eastern Railway."

"How do you know that?" I asked.

"There is a line of steamers from Harwich to Antwerp," he replied. "Who is your informant?"

"It must be Mrs. Hardy," I said."

"You can trust her?"

"I think so. I must start at once."

"No," said Shaw, "wait. In the first place, you can't get to Harwich till the morning; in the second, this mysterious epistle was only left here an hour ago; and in the third, the Antwerp boats leave at night."

"And now," I asked—"and now do you believe I saw Miss Beaufoy just now?"

"No," he said, "no, I do not. Nothing will convince me."

As he was speaking, a hansom dashed by the railings of the hospital. I recognised the bag on the roof of the cab, before I recognised the occupant. As before, a gas-lamp cast its light on her face; but this time she wore no veil. Both of us saw her plainly, though she drew her head back. It was Miss Beaufoy.

"Now," I cried triumphantly, "do you believe me?"

"Yes," said Shaw; "but explain to me why Miss Beaufoy is roaming round London at this time in the morning?"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A NARROW ESCAPE.

DR. SHAW had to use a moral persuasion, which trenched on physical force, to draw me inside the door of St. Bartimeus's, so eager was I to get upon the track of the miscreant who was responsible for Mary Fortescue's safety.

"Come, come," said Shaw, in that peculiarly persuasive voice which seems to belong by right to members of the medical profession; "for the present nothing can be done, and you will be fitter for a task which may tax all our energies, after a little rest here, than if you spend your time driving about, and pacing the dark platform of an empty railway station."

I felt that he was strongly, loyally interested in the matter. There was that in Dr. Shaw's manner, there is still, I should rather say, which inspires trust, because you feel that there is no attempt at fooling you. Some doctors whom I know, worthy men, too, handicap their earnest moments of feeling by making no difference between their way of soothing a fretful patient and the reassurance they convey to a reasonable man. Shaw's manner is, like him-

self, dependable. He was not merely trying to coax me to rest; he felt sure that the repose he recommended would not be in any way prejudicial to the interests which I had at heart.

I yielded with the best grace I could muster to his persuasions, and in a short time we were seated in his sanctum, where the smouldering fire, with a little care, soon gave signs of a cheerful vitality. There was a neat and choice little supper left upon the table.

"You are probably too excited to sleep just now," said Shaw, "so you may as well eat something."

I felt, to my own surprise, no disinclination to this proposition.

"You see," said Shaw, "according to your idea, there is every reason to trust Mrs. Hardy's information. If it be accurate, Plöwitz cannot cross to Antwerp till to-morrow, or rather, as it is now past three, this evening. From what I gather of Miss Fortescue's character, she is overawed and helpless, and will shrink from making a scene so long as Plöwitz treats her with outward deference."

That was, I felt, quite true. I could imagine the polite cruelty with which he would speak for her, misrepresent her, and, probably, enlist sympathy for her, from the very people who, if they could but read the facts of the case, would gladly come between him and his prey. As we ate a light supper, Shaw

derived from me additional information upon some points which I had not previously made sufficiently clear, and gave me great, and, I could not but think, reasonable encouragement.

"It is not Plöwitz's interest to resort to desperate measures," he observed. "He evidently hopes in some way to compel her to consent to his suit; but if we act with discretion, as well as with vigour, I do not see that any actual harm or danger is to be anticipated. At any rate, we are on the right track."

"Suppose," said I, "that note was a forgery—a trick of the Basilisk's to put us on the wrong track?"

"It would disappoint our hopes, but it would not make our difficulties greater than if we had not received such information. The excellent Rosebush will have all the railway-stations watched, depend upon it. The gravest inference, if that note be a forgery, will be that Miss Beaufoy has discovered Mrs. Hardy's sympathy with you and Miss Fortescue."

Just as he finished speaking, we started and looked at one another. There was the sound of a footstep crunching the gravel on the drive.

It came nearer; it mounted the steps to the door.

"Now, who in the name of wonder," said Shaw, "can this be, at three in the morning?"

The bell was rung by a careful hand, and a knocking, apparently with knuckles, on the door followed.

"That must be Anthony," said Shaw—"the porter."

We went together to open the door. There, wrapped in a thick cloak, stood the porter.

"Busy work to-night, sir," he said, coughing, and putting that irony into his words which men of his class use as a safety-valve for outraged susceptibilities. "A 'ansom cab brought this, sir, and it's a waiting for a answer at the gate."

"This" was a small note, which the old man handed to Shaw.

"Come in and sit down, Anthony," said Shaw, hastily shutting the door, and pointing to a hall-chair.

We returned to the study.

"It's to me," said Shaw, opening the note.

He glanced at it, and handed it to me.

It was a small note, hurriedly written in pencil on thin paper, upon some rough surface, such as the cover of a book.

The writing was like Mary's. How my heart beat as I read it.

"If Mr. Coplestone has come to you, tell him that I am not gone. They are keeping me here still. The side-gate will be open, and Mrs. Hardy will leave the door unlocked. She has helped me. There is a cab waiting. Send him back at once, if he would ever see me again. The driver may be trusted."

"That is just like them!" I exclaimed. "The Basilisk has tried to put us on a false scent, and all the while Mary is still at Hanover Lodge."

Shaw looked anxious.

"Do you know the handwriting?" he asked.

"It is Mary's," I said. "I will go."

"It may be a trick," said he.

"So may the other," I answered; "much more probably. Once before they pretended that she had gone, and kept her a prisoner. This is only a variation of the old trick. The note about the Harwich route is a clumsy forgery. It would have sent us off on a wild-goose chase, and meanwhile Plöwitz could carry her off some other way without fear of interruption."

Shaw seemed impressed.

"You know them better than I do."

"Yes; I will go at once."

"Perhaps you had better," he said. "Take this with you. It may be useful."

He handed me a neat little revolver. I took it, and resolved to use it on the first possible provocation from any of that gang of murderers.

"Now then; where is the cab?" I asked as we came out into the hall.

"At the gate, sir, and waiting," said Anthony, gruffly, but resignedly.

His night's rest was hopelessly spoilt, but he contrived to put a sort of latent tone of sympathy even into his gruffness.

At the gate we found a very ordinary-looking hansom.

"Who sent you here?" said I to the driver.

"The woman up at Hanover Lodge," said the man, a grey-bearded individual, who seemed more fitted for the box of a decrepit four-wheeler. "Hardy's missis, as keeps the gates."

"I shall go," I said in a whisper to Shaw.

We had a hurried conversation as to plans and communications, which, short as it was, was broken in upon by the driver, who observed:

"Beg pardon, sir; but Mrs. Hardy said, as if you didn't come sharp, you might as well not come at all. No offence, gentlemen; but that was the message she gave to me."

"All right!" I said, and jumping in, waved a good-bye to Shaw, and was driven off at a round pace towards Hanover Lodge.

There were no signs of day when the cab stopped, as well as I could judge, at the entrance to the lane.

"I was to stop here," said the man—"not to disturb the folks at the gate was my orders."

"Then you will wait here?" said I, standing on the footboard.

"I was to wait here till you came back," said the ancient driver, who seemed a model of discipline.

"And then?" I asked.

"Then I was to drive back where I brought you from."

This seemed convincing enough, under the circumstances I jumped down, and made my way along the lane. Keeping well on the grass-grown side-walk, I soon reached the gates of Hanover Lodge. It was very dark, but I could dimly make out the outline of the gate-house and the bars of the big gate. I crept up to it. The little side-gate was ajar! It yielded noiselessly to my pressure. I was within the grounds!

Swiftly and silently, with the revolver ready for instant use, I sped along the turf-border till well beyond the cottage.

The turf continued to muffle my footsteps, the darkness and the thick shrubbery effectually concealed my form. Soon I was crossing the bridge from which, but a few hours before, I had taken my desperate leap for life. I crouched beneath the parapet as I crossed it, lest haply some eye might see my form against the sky, as I had seen the figures of my baffled pursuers a while ago. But there was little fear of that now. The moon had long sunk, and the darkness—the darkness of the autumn morning—was intense. I reached the end of the avenue, and with a heart beating more and more eagerly as I neared the goal, pictur-

ing the delight, even in the danger, of meeting Mary at the side-door, and bringing her off in safety to the haven of St. Bartimeus's, I made out the dim shape of the house, dark, lifeless, menacing, girt by whispering masses of sere-leaved trees across the looming lawn. There, in that dark heartless shadow, my love's warm heart was beating eagerly; in the midst of its fear, its suspense, love was keeping a vigil for me, I knew. And with a strength and a resolve which made all dangers seem small, and death, if needs be, for her sake a delight, I prepared to skirt the grass and reach the gate of promise.

A stumble over tree-roots in the darkness gave me a warning that caution was necessary as well as speed, and, with all the visual power I could muster, I sought once more to pierce the darkness and to make a safe course for the side-door. Then, as I looked into the thickest gloom, the darkness, with a dull roar, opened into a blinding gush of light; the windows blazed a moment into shape, and then fell shapeless into an abyss of fire and smoke, the earth shook beneath my feet, and I fell prostrate, while a fierce rain of shattered brickwork crushed among the branches of the surrounding trees. Now I understood why the Basilisk was roaming about the streets of London at two o'clock in the morning. Hanover Lodge, with all its guilty secrets, was blown up, and I was destined to have perished in the ruins!

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE BIRDS HAVE FLOWN.

THE darkness which settled over all things after the explosion, was appalling. My senses seemed numbed by it, and I lay helpless, while the echoes of the crash went booming in my ears, like great rings when a stone has been hurled into still water. I picked myself up, and found that I was unhurt. The Basilisk's diabolical project, which, had the cab been a few minutes earlier, would undoubtedly have compassed my destruction, filled me with a fierce determination of revenge. I had escaped them. They should not escape me. But Mary! Still in the power of Plöwitz. My first care must be for her. The explosion would gather people together. The police would soon be on the spot. I could not spare the time to be subjected to the enquiries of the police. I must get back to Shaw unobserved, and prosecute to the utmost our endeavours to trace Mary.

As I got farther away from the scene of the explosion I began to collect my thoughts. I felt a perfect conviction that the first note was genuine, that Mary was away, and

that Plöwitz designed removing her to the Continent, *viâ* Harwich. The second note I felt convinced likewise was a design of the Basilisk to do away with a witness of the unlawful doings of her home, to avenge herself on a rival, and to punish with death one who had refused her proffered love. I scrambled and stumbled along, making through hedges and over the railway-bank for the spot where I had left the cab. I found it gone, as I had imagined would be the case. The driver was doubtless one of the Basilisk's myrmidons disguised. Yes! There had seemed to be something familiar to me in his voice, disguised as he was. It was Grimes! With all the haste I could make, consistently with safety, I pushed my way across country, anxious only to avoid observation and delay. Once I got nearer the road than I had thought, and crouched close while hurrying feet and eager voices passed. Then the sound of horses' hoofs came nearer at a furious pace, and a fire-engine, with its comet-like trail of flying sparks, went thundering down the road towards Frognal. Once or twice I thought I had lost my bearings, but soon recovered them by coming unexpectedly upon the hedge that bordered the highway; but I knew the general direction pretty well by this time, and finally gained the road, not more than a mile from St. Bartimeus's, after on arduous cross-country journey, unobserved. I found Shaw waiting up in much anxiety.

"You are safe! What was that explosion?" was his immediate enquiry.

"Hanover Lodge," I said. "I was destined to be one of the victims, if not the only one."

Shaw stood petrified with astonishment.

"Good Heavens!" I exclaimed, as a new thought struck me. "Suppose they have left her there to perish?"

"My dear Coplestone, that is utterly improbable," said Shaw very decidedly. "The second note was doubtless a trick to compass your destruction; but there was Plöwitz to be reckoned with about Miss Fortescue, and it would suit the Basilisk far more to leave her in the power of a man she loathes than to put her suddenly to death."

That was indeed true, and I took courage.

"Come," said he; "at eleven we have to see Inspector Rosebush again. It is still early. Take a little rest, and we will soon be on the track again in good earnest."

For a while I slept profoundly, and in due time we set out once more for Scotland Yard.

Inspector Rosebush received us with an *empressement* which showed that he attached no less importance now to our case than he had on first getting a clue to the identity of Plöwitz.

"They could not have got away last night—that is certain," he said. "They have not been traced yet, and haven't gone by any of the early boats; but the longer

they remain in England, the more impossible is it for them to get away unobserved. They will cross this evening."

This he said after reading the note from Mrs. Hardy, which he retained, without making any observation upon it whatever.

There was a moment's silence, after which the Inspector handed me a brief official report of the destruction of Hanover Lodge, and the presumed death of all the inmates. I looked at Mr. Rosebush when I had read the report. There was a strange look of incredulity on his features.

"That is a curious coincidence," he said drily.

I then told him of my accidental identification of the Basilisk in the cab, and showed him the second note.

He looked out of the window for a minute or two, holding the note in one hand, and tapping the table with the fingers of the other. Whatever he thought, he said but little.

At last he deigned to express an opinion.

"I don't think there was anybody in the house."

I knew the Basilisk, and didn't feel at all sure.

Meanwhile he assured us that everything possible was being, and would be, done. He regarded the Harwich route as probably the real one, and informed us that there would be a strict watch kept upon the passengers crossing that evening. Shaw and I resolved to go down and watch.

We could do no particular good; but I was feverish with anxiety to do something—to greet Mary as soon as possible, to witness the overthrow of the villain Plöwitz's schemes. Our interview with the Inspector had been very short. We hailed a well-horsed hansom, and caught the twelve o'clock train from Liverpool Street. An early edition of an evening paper was already out, and the newsboys were crying the latest sensation. I bought a paper, and read as follows:—

"*A terrible explosion occurred at an early hour this morning at Hanover Lodge, Frognal, resulting in the total destruction of the house, and the death of all its inmates. The house was the residence of Mr. Beaufoy, the well-known philanthropist, who had also made a considerable name by his scientific researches. The other members of the household comprised, it is believed, Miss Beaufoy and Miss Fortescue, Mr. Plöwitz, a distinguished German savant, who had been a guest of Mr. Beaufoy's for some time past, and two or three servants. The cause of the deplorable occurrence is at present shrouded in mystery, but there is reason to suppose that the explosion was due to some of the chemicals used by the unfortunate gentleman in his scientific pursuits. By this terrible calamity, several charitable institutions lose a munificent supporter, especially those devoted to the welfare of the blind. Further particulars will be given in our later editions.*"

At Parkeston Quay we could neither hear nor see any-

thing of the travellers. At the hotels in Harwich our observations and enquiries were equally unavailing. We watched the arrival of the boats from Ipswich at the pier with eager curiosity.

It was a beautiful warm October afternoon, and quite a summer-like look was given to the quaint old wooden pier at Harwich by the number of people who were tempted out by the fine weather. There were elderly clergymen and their dowdy wives, smart townspeople, pretty children, excursionists in straw hats and sand-shoes; women, who abound at Harwich, with projecting front teeth, silk dresses cameo brooches, long gold chains, ringlets, and sand-shoes; tanned fishermen, stalwart coastguardsmen; lovers in plenty; but no one resembling either Plöwitz or Mary Fortescue.

We went over to Dovercourt, and drew the hotels there. They gave no better result than the others. For a while we gazed from the little sand-cliffs over the German Ocean, while the sun began to sink low. Then we returned, like unquiet spirits, to the pier, and watched the broad estuaries of the Stour and the Orwell, calm as oil, with the beautiful tints of the autumn sunset turning the landscape into a Turneresque fairyland.

"No more steamers to-night, sir," said a tanned official of whom we made enquiry.

So we took leave for a while of the broad estuaries, of

the smart steamers and picturesque fishing smacks, and the great guardship looking vast and majestic in the twilight.

"They must be coming by the boat-train, after all," said Shaw at last, as we went towards the station once more.

We returned dejectedly to Parkeston. I began to get in a fever of excitement as the time for the arrival of the boat-train approached.

At last it appeared. The passengers streamed out, but amongst them none like Mary or Plöwitz. I was in despair. Suddenly I was touched on the arm. I started, expecting to see the hateful face of Plöwitz. It was only the civil waiter at the hotel, who had been in attendance on us at dinner.

"Is this for you, sir?" he said, holding out a telegram.

It was for me.

I tore it open, and read :

"*Rosebush, Scotland Yard, to Coplestone, Parkeston Hotel.—Parties started from London for Antwerp this morning.*"

There was time to secure berths, and ere long we were steaming out of Harwich harbour over a smooth sea, under the countless stars, *en route* for Antwerp—for Mary!

CHAPTER XXX.

A CHECK.

DAWN over the broad Scheldt. On one side of the river, banks of dark clouds, of which it was hard to tell yet whether they had stolen the gloom from the departed night, or were threatening disaster to the coming day. Quaint church-towers, windmills, and independent, isolated-looking haystacks, gave a touch of homeliness to the great flatness of the shore, and numerous barges and fishing-boats, owning some spot in that strange land as home, took off something from the weirdness of the weltering expanse of wide river. I paced the deck, with Shaw, as the eyes of day slowly opened, and the mystery and majesty of night were dissipated. The water was smooth; there was scarcely a breath of wind; but the air was keen and raw in the autumn morning. The freshness of the meadows was strangely mingled with the saltness of the sea. It seemed years since we had driven from Scotland Yard to Liverpool Street—months since we had overhauled the Harwich and Dovercourt Hotels; the dark drive to Hanover Lodge, the stealthy reconnoitring, and the explosion, seemed as remote and as far from my actual experience as any great

terrestrial convulsion in some prehistoric epoch. There was an air of unreality about the swiftly-gliding steamer, the silver-grey water, and the low land which seemed to begin in the water and end in mist.

We had had a few hours' sleep, and were by no means jaded by the exertions of the past twenty-four hours; but the strangeness and suddenness of all that had happpened, the doubt and the fears of the future, had a depressing effect upon my mind, and Shaw, although he spoke calmly and bravely enough, was anxious too.

As the day broadened, passengers, with the pallid grime of an unwonted night upon their countenances, began to appear upon deck. The sight of ordinary fellow-creatures, a cup of good coffee, and the appearance of a few tentative beams of early sunshine, went far towards restoring cheerfulness and something of confidence. The great tower of Antwerp Cathedral was showing clearer and clearer, and the interest excited by a new scene was chasing away my morbid impressions and arousing a wholesome curiosity. I began to feel confident that we should succeed in our quest. Shaw had held the language of reassurance on this point all along.

"It is a certainty," he said. "Plöwitz is evidently a valuable catch, and, with the telegraph at work, there need be by this time no place that he could reach which will not be well watched."

"But Mary?" I said.

"Mary," said Shaw convincingly, "will be perfectly safe. It is neither to his interest nor to anyone's to harm her. Her evidence will not be particularly valuable, as far as I can gather, and without her the police evidently have all the information they want. No," he went on, "Plöwitz is sure to be caught now, and when he is taken, Mary will be safe."

In spite of these reassuring views my anxiety increased to a feverish pitch as the moment of landing drew near. In the confusion attending debarkation I lost hold of the comfort I had derived from my companion's words. But after we had gone through the formalities incident to landing on Belgian soil, we were accosted by a trim-looking gentleman with short, grey whiskers, a long thin nose with close nostrils, and a firm, straight mouth. He mentioned each of our names, and identified us as we answered to them. He then informed us that he was an agent of the English police, and that he had received instructions from Chief Inspector Rosebush to afford us all possible assistance in our search for Miss Fortescue; while, at the same time, he had been advised that we might be of some service in tracing Plöwitz.

Mr. Harper—such, we learned, was the name of Rosebush's auxiliary—very courteously invited us to his house, or rather to the house in which he had apartments on a

semi-official footing. As we were on the point of setting off, a subordinate arrived on the scene, and a short conversation in an undertone ensued.

"It is all right," said Mr. Harper, turning to us and showing some signs of excitement; "Plöwitz has been traced. We can secure him now."

"And the lady?" said Shaw.

"The lady—no," answered Harper; "but there is no doubt that where the one is found the other will not be far off."

I suppressed with difficulty an indignant desire to put Harper right in his view of the relations of the fugitives, but there was no time just then for explanations, and we were soon threading our way through streets of tall houses. Presently we emerged into a large square. The bells of the cathedral and of innumerable churches were chiming, and I looked with some admiration at the picturesque novelty of the scene, being, like many Englishmen, especially struck with the old-world figures of the clergy. Two or three venerable-looking priests passed us as we crossed the square. We walked, the three of us together, conversing casually about the aspect of the town, being perhaps too anxious to talk about the business immediately in hand. Suddenly I caught sight of a figure in the habit of a priest emerging from a street some yards ahead of us, and rapidly crossing the end of the square. An instinct

brought me to a momentary stop ; an impulse drove me to rush straight at the venerable figure.

"Plöwitz ! Villain ! Where is Mary ?" I cried as I clutched at the throat of the ecclesiastic.

At my cry the seeming priest gave a start backwards, avoiding my grasp, but knocking off in the violent motion the broad-brimmed hat which had been drawn well down over his brows.

Instinct was right. It was Plöwitz.

There was a strange light of fear and resolution combined in his wicked-looking eyes, and a curious smile on his lips, such as I had never seen before. He answered never a word, but flinging out his left arm, he struck me with some weight in the chest,and with his right-hand fired a revolver full at me. I staggered from the blow with which he checked my rush, and, as I staggered, I heard the bullet whistle past my ear, and a crash of glass behind me showed that it had gone through the window of some good citizen of Antwerp. Ere he could fire another shot the wretch was seized and disarmed. The odds were great, and he made no attempt at a struggle, but I saw a hungry gleam of terror and despair in his eyes that made amends for some of the harm that he had done.

He was secured, and the crowd which had instantaneously gathered was in some measure dispersed.

"You Villain," I cried, "what have you done with Miss Fortescue?"

"You have found *me*," he said; "you must find *her*."

"Where is she?" I asked sternly.

"That," said Plöwitz, half closing his eyes, and smiling through the pallor of his fear—"that is, and shall remain, my secret."

CHAPTER XXXI.

EXPECTATION.

AT the very moment of his downfall, while he was actually at last in the hands of the Belgian police, to whom, in common with the force in most European countries, his capture had for a long time been a sort of day-dream—at the time when he evidently considered that the game was up, Plöwitz enjoyed over one of his enemies, at least, the triumph of complete revenge. Through all the manifest tokens of his discomfiture and fear, it was evident that he not only appreciated, but even enjoyed, my terrified anxiety for Mary, my fury with himself.

I did not realise to the full the strength of his position until I had had a conference on the subject with the police authorities. The chief official was exceedingly courteous and sympathetic. Plöwitz was calmly defiant, and spoke throughout of Mary in a tone of proprietorship which did not tend to promote any judicial calmness of demeanour in me. He did not, as I had partly expected, refuse to say anything at all on the subject. On the contrary, he tated that I had no right whatever to question his conduct

and no *locus standi* whatever in the affair. The lady had been confided to his safe conduct by her guardian, Mr. Beaufoy, a rich and influential English gentleman. He had fulfilled his trust, and placed the lady in safe keeping. When any proofs of foul play came to light the police would be able to act without any prompting from an excited outsider. If their help should be claimed by Mr. Beaufoy, or any of the lady's relatives, he would be happy to give them any information. In the meantime he protested against this offensive interference with his private affairs, and must decline to say anything more on the subject.

The authorities were quite prepared to believe any evil of their prisoner, but they were equally impressed, I could see, with the logical weakness of my position. Taking what comfort I could with me from a general promise to keep a watch over my interests, I departed with a heavy heart in company with Shaw.

"Come," said my good friend, "never despair. You couldn't exactly expect our friend to play into our hands after all, and give up the only source of power that remains with him. But I don't believe in mysterious disappearances. We shall certainly be able to trace Miss Fortescue."

I could not take a hopeful view of the case. I had all along, foolishly enough, imagined that when Plöwitz was

found Mary would be found, and the disappointment was as great as the latent hope had been.

At this moment, Harper, Inspector Rosebush's agent, who had remained behind at the police-station, caught us up.

"By-the-by," said Shaw suddenly, "I suppose Miss Fortescue is not at the house to which we were going, when Plöwitz saved us the trouble by meeting us?"

"No," said Harper; "I enquired. No lady had been there."

"But you can trace their movements from landing?"

"Yes, sir. That's just what I'm about doing."

Shaw was now urgent that we should leave this part of the enquiry for the present in the hands of professional detectives, and take some much-needed refreshment ourselves.

Harper promised to bring a full report of proceedings as soon as he had concluded his investigations to that best of inns, the Hôtel St. Antoine, whither we now directed our steps, engaged rooms, and ordered breakfast, calling on the way at the office of an English solicitor by direction of Harper. Once again the salient points in the story of Mary's abduction were detailed, and Mr. Leverett, the solicitor, was commissioned to obtain an interview with Plöwitz, and see if there were any practicable conditions on which he would consent to aid in her restitution.

We had not finished our repast before Mr. Leverett returned.

"I am afraid," he said, "that there is nothing to be hoped from that man—at present, anyhow. He cynically declares that there will be enough charges against him to swamp any considerations of clemency on the score of his revealing the lady's abode. And the strongest point, and one on which he seems to dwell with much unction, is that she was committed to his care by her guardian, and that, till the guardian requires an account from him, no one has a scrap of right to interfere."

This was the same dismal tale over again. We sat in silence, while a gusty wind whirled the dead leaves round outside the window of the *salle-à-manger*, and the cathedral chimes clanged out a chorus from *Marta*.

"No," continued Mr. Leverett, wrinkling his forehead, and pursing his lips, as if to accompany the chimes with a silent whistle; "no; I don't see what is to be done, unless you can get hold of the guardian and bring pressure to bear on Plöwitz through him, and meantime endeavour by all means to trace and communicate with the lady herself."

"That's just what we are doing," said I.

And having arranged to report progress, and received a hearty promise of Mr. Leverett's utmost aid, Shaw and I were again left to our breakfast and our reflections. Mine became intolerably anxious. Shaw, blessed with a more phlegmatic temperament, and not so deeply interested as

I was, was able to enjoy the quasi-tranquillity of a man who feels that all that is possible under the circumstances has been, or is being, done, and enjoyed some well-earned repose. I wandered about aimlessly, now seeking to distract my mind with a little sight-seeing, now with the general observation of the streets of a strange city. But I could never keep long away from the hotel, lest Harper should return, and after a while gave it up in despair, and passed the time as best I could, waiting at the hotel.

At length Harper returned, and I listened in breathless suspense to his report.

He had traced Plöwitz and Miss Fortescue, first to an hotel near the quay, where he had passed the lady off as his invalid sister, and then to a very respectable house, where furnished rooms were let. He had taken rooms for himself alone here, stating that his cousin—for so he now called his companion—was waiting to be fetched by some friends. In a short time a Sister of Mercy had called, and had gone away with the lady in a cab. Plöwitz had gone out shortly afterwards, and had not returned. Where he had assumed his disguise as a priest, and whither he was bound when we accidentally crossed his path, and I instinctively recognised him, Harper had not yet found out, nor did we care to know. Shaw and I looked at one another with great relief. Mary was to some extent in safety. She was in the care of good women, and whatever

might be her guardian's subsequent plans for her, we should have no difficulty in finding her now, and meantime we could feel quite sure of her kind treatment.

I could not rest, however, without seeing for myself the place where she had so lately been, and following Harper's directions, I, after some wandering, arrived at the house.

The good landlady, warmed with sympathy, and opening the heart of her garrulity to an interested listener, described graphically enough the incidents of Mary's short sojourn under her roof. The lady, she said, seemed *distraite* and sad; she had been weeping, and would take nothing. The gentleman was very polite and attentive, but not sympathetic.

"And the Sister," I asked, "the lady who took her away —did she seem kind?"

The woman shook her head, and deprecatingly raised the backs of her hands. The young lady seemed terrified when she saw her, but the lady had great power and persuaded her. The gentleman said she must either stay with him or go with her, and then the young lady seemed very angry, and went away with the tall Sister.

"What was the Sister like?"

"She was tall—very tall; like so many of the English women."

"English!"

"Yes, certainly English; and very handsome—a very pale face, and such eyes! Never had she seen such eyes; but they were not good, those eyes! Ah, what was the matter with monsieur?"

I started and turned pale. What if this Sister of Mercy should be the Basilisk? It must be so. I put a few questions which seemed to put it beyond doubt.

"And the carriage in which they went away?"

It was an ordinary carriage. She had not taken any particular notice of it.

"And where had they gone?"

She did not know. The lady had given no directions. The driver seemed to know, for he drove off at once.

I returned to the hotel, once more a prey to devouring anxiety. Shaw, too, was much moved by this latest development. He begged me, however, to sit down and rest, and endeavour to compose my mind.

"No," I said, "it is impossible; I must go out. It is the only resource I have now. I must find Mary!"

"But," said he soothingly, "you can't expect to find her by walking about the streets of Antwerp at random."

"Why not?" I said. "I found Plöwitz by accident this morning. I may find Mary by accident this evening."

And out I went.

As I pursued my vague quest, the clear light that precedes sunset on a windy evening brought every object out in startling relief. The leaves were flying and whirling around; masses of clouds, amber and grey, were confusedly rolling across the sky; the rooks were cawing about the towers, and the strange music of the chimes rang out fitfully upon the battling breeze. I felt a sense of danger, and, passing a shop where a large array of sticks caught my eye, I stept in and purchased a serviceable life-preserver. I wandered about for some time aimlessly enough, but by degrees I bent my steps in the direction of the house whence Mary had been removed by the Basilisk. Two or three times I paced the street, hoping, it may be, that some inspiration would draw me in the direction which Mary had taken, and then plunged at random into a labyrinth of narrow streets paved with cobble-stones, ill-smelling, and framed by high, old-fashioned, and dilapidated houses. The dusk was now rapidly falling, though occasional gleams of red light brought the outlines of the gables into weird distinctness as the rack and vapours were swept by a strong rush of wind from the face of the still glowing west.

In the gates of the courtyard by which entrance was obtained to most of the houses in this region, a few people here and there lingered picturesque groups occasionally,

homely and honest folk, having a little gossip after their day's work, but more often ill-favoured and sordid beings, wrinkled old hags, bold-faced women, and hulking, ill-favoured men in blouses.

In the cloud-swept sky I caught a glimpse of a pale moon, and then suddenly, in clear twilight, there emerged from a gateway not fifty yards ahead of me a figure which brought me to a standstill—a tall figure of a woman in long dark robes. I could not be mistaken in that form. It was the Basilisk! I sought the shelter of a projecting doorway, and watched.

She paused, went on a few paces, and then suddenly turned and went back to the house whence she had emerged. She disappeared in the doorway.

I quickly covered the intervening ground, and reconnoitred. I found myself in front of the gate of a court-yard. On the left-hand side was a dark doorway, up three or four steep brick steps. A feeble light flickered in a window beside the door. High walls, with only a few windows, bounded the narrow yard. I had scarcely a minute to make these observations when the sound of a door opening and of voices caused me to draw back into the shadow. One voice was the voice I knew so well—the voice of Giulia Beaufoy. The other was the harsh, croaking, wicked-sounding voice of an old woman.

"*A dix heures,*" said the Basilisk.

"*A dix heures,*" repeated the other voice in a tone of malicious obsequiousness.

Then the majestic figure of the Basilisk again came out, looking supernaturally tall and imposing in the dark robes and white head-gear of some religious order. She was followed by a broad-shouldered but bent old woman, who nodded, and leered, and rubbed her skinny hands together until Miss Beaufoy had turned a neighbouring corner. She then turned back into the house and hobbled up the steps. The rough tones of a man's voice greeted her return.

I waited a few seconds and then stepped out and examined the house. It was high and dilapidated in appearance. No lights were visible in the front except in one window at the very top. As I looked, a figure appeared between the window and the light, the casement was softly opened, and a girlish form gazed out from that sordid prison upon the scudding clouds and the young moonlight. I endeavoured to read the features. The light was too uncertain and the distance too great to allow of my identifying her; but I had a sudden and great hope that it was none other than my lost love. The thought staggered me. I endeavoured to attract her attention, but at the first sound the casement was quickly closed, and the shadow disappeared from the window. I watched a little while longer, but the notice attracted from passing roughs

counselled prudence, and I went away full of vague hopes and fears, resolved to be on the watch at ten o'clock. Come what might, I would solve the mystery of the Basilisk's appointment.

CHAPTER XXXII.

SAVED.

SOME little way I walked with no fixed plan. The sudden hope inspired by the prospect of action soon waned and expired. Was the form I had seen at the window indeed Mary Fortescue? If I encountered the Basilisk at her ten o'clock rendezvous, should I be any nearer the realisation of my hopes? At least I could trace her movements, and so possibly get a clue to the place where she had taken Mary, if it should prove not to be the house where she had made the appointment with the hideous old woman. Taking a turn to the right I found myself upon a small bridge, which spanned a dark narrow canal bordered with high houses, sparsely lit here and there by fantastically disposed patches of dim lamp-lights; here prolonged in irregular lines on the dark water, where a window in the lowest storey almost met the surface of the canal; there set like a bleared eye in the middle of a towering gable; zigzagging along on the levels of the various storeys, with frequent gaps of utter darkness. As the still freshening wind came sweeping along in strong

gusts, I could hear the water lapping at the slimy walls, clammily pandering to secret crime, and solicitous for the custody of corpses. There was in the middle of the parapet of the bridge a lamp, which flickered and flared in the gusts of wind. By its light I could just see that the dark mysterious object by the narrow wharf close to the bridge was a long narrow barge. At the foot of the slippery-looking steps, which went down from the bridge to the wharf, was a broad-built decrepit-looking wherry. The clouds, which were fast piling up before the wind, had now hidden the moon, but the still varying denseness of their folds caused a constant heaving of the darkness, like the struggling respirations of nightmare. The influence of the scene was weird and oppressive. It might be that these tall, silent houses were the homes of simple honest folk; that in those dimly-lighted rooms the children of toil were contentedly enjoying their humble evening meal; that the wicked-looking water was a wholesome byway of honest industry. But I looked up the long rows of darkling houses, and knew that in one of them the wiles of the Basilisk were at work; that there, in all likelihood Mary was immured; and the remembrance of the tall dark figure of her worst foe, and the cringing crone who was evidently entirely at that foe's disposal, banished any cheerful ideas, and touched the scene with the pencil of a Doré, as it drew the weird fantasies which illustrate the *Contes Drolatiques* of Balzac.

The aspect of the watery way from the bridge became so sinister that I returned to reconnoitre the house once more from the street. To this impulse I owe, in all probability, the rescue of Mary, the preservation of what was dearer to me than life itself.

The street was very silent and deserted, though it was yet quite early. A few people passed me, their *sabots* making an inordinate clatter on the rough stones; but when I paused close to the house there was no one in sight. I looked up. The light was still in the topmost window; the window was again open. I determined to make an attempt at least to settle my doubts as to the identity of the occupant of that room.

I looked up to the window, and called softly and clearly:

"Mary!"

There was no response.

Again I called, with a little more emphasis:

"Mary!"

It was not fancy. No. At my second call a figure came rapidly to the window, but ere I could either hear or utter anything, a sharp whisper from the adjacent doorway broke the stillness.

"Hist! Monsieur Plöwitz!"

It was the old woman.

"Who is that?" I asked.

"It is I—Marie Delbruyck."

"Do you know who I am?" I asked, approaching the door.

The old woman grinned and courtesied.

"I have been expecting Monsieur Plöwitz," she said.

She evidently took me for the man she had been told to expect. Tumultuous as my thoughts were, I could see no reason for suspecting a "plant" so skilfully executed, under circumstances which were purely fortuitous. Heaven had put this means of fighting the Basilisk into my hands, and I resolved to make the most of it.

"Where is the lady?" I asked.

"Which lady, monsieur?" she asked with a horrible grin.

"The tall lady."

"Mademoiselle Beaufoy?"

"Yes; Mademoiselle Beaufoy."

"Has not monsieur seen her?"

"No; I must see her."

"She said she must see monsieur, but she has left a message for monsieur in case she missed him."

"And the other lady—is she safe?"

"Quite safe. She is in the top room, locked in."

"Good," said I.

It was awful to think of Mary imprisoned in the power of such wretches. We had moved out of the street, and were standing just inside the little entrance court. As we

talked I could hear the rough murmuring tones of a man's voice, and the shriller intonation of a woman in conversation inside the house.

"Now, Marie," I went on, "you must give me the message quickly, for I must find mademoiselle at once."

The old hag came closer to me, and laid a finger on my arm, giving a sort of dig now and then to impress the points of her message upon me.

"All will be ready at ten o'clock. You must meet mademoiselle here at ten. The lady will be put into the boat. It is my son's boat—Georges, there ; you may hear him talking—and he will take monsieur and the lady down the river, and put them on board the ship."

"But," said I, almost gasping for breath, "how if the lady will not come ?"

"Ah, monsieur," said Madame Delbruyck with a diabolical leer, "she will not know anything about it !"

"How ?"

"She might make a disturbance ; but we use "—here she made a significant gesture and grinned ghoulishly.

"And then ?"

"And then monsieur and my son Georges will carry her down and put her in the boat. It is close by, on the canal. Through that door and through the woodshed—that is the canal."

I was so horrified by the disclosure of this diabolical

scheme that, after a moment's silence, I judged it prudent to assume an air of suspicion.

"Very well," I said. "But Georges—is he to be trusted?"

"Oh, monsieur," said Mdme. Delbruyck, lifting her hands in deprecation, "we are honest folks here, and Mdlle. Beaufoy has paid us handsomely."

"Well, you shall be paid still more handsomely when the young lady is safe."

"Have no fear, monsieur."

"No; but I am anxious; and I should like to see Mdlle. Beaufoy again. She will be here at ten?"

"Certainly, monsieur—at ten."

I gave the old woman a piece of money, which she received, to my surprise, with some show of reluctance, as though, in her way, she had some ideas of fair dealing, and, having made a bargain, was prepared to abide by the terms she had proposed or accepted; and, with profuse thanks, she ushered me out once more into the street.

A brisk walk of ten or twelve minutes enabled me to recover from the astounding revelation of villainy of which I had so strangely become possessed. I found myself once more in a cheerful, well-lighted street. I entered a quiet but inviting restaurant, and dined frugally. Then, with the aid of a cigar, I reviewed the situation. The revelation of the plot by Mdme. Delbruyck ceased to be so very sur-

prising when I thought the matter over. The main outlines of the scheme had probably been arranged by Plöwitz and Miss Beaufoy together. His arrest was evidently not known to the Basilisk at the time of her visit to her evil ally, and that lady had, equally evidently, her mind being full of the expected visit of Plöwitz, whom she did not know, assumed that the stranger who was loitering about the street, and calling her name, was none other than the foreign gentleman to whom Miss Beaufoy had given a rendezvous at Mdme. Delbruyck's house. Now for the future. The simplest plan promised to be the best. I would return, summon the old woman, inform her that the plan of operations was changed, gain access to Mary, and carry her off to the shelter of the Hotel St. Antoine, before the time fixed for the Basilisk's return. It was now eight o'clock. I would return in half an hour, so as to allow a plausible time for the change of plans to have elapsed, and, maintaining the *role* of Plöwitz, have Mary in safety by the time the next hour was struck by the innumerable clocks of the city.

The time for action soon arrived.

I set out, and as the chimes were sounding the half-hour, I again entered the street where Mary was kept a prisoner. As I approached the door it flashed upon me that the Basilisk might meanwhile have learnt of the arrest of Plöwitz, and coming to arrange some modification of her

scheme, been informed of my visit. It struck a chill to my heart to think what she might be capable of in her rage and disappointment. But, in any case, there was no time to lose. I went into the dark courtyard, mounted the brick steps, and knocked at the door. The voices which were talking inside ceased; I heard the clatter of *sabots* over the brick floor, and Mdme. Delbruyck's hideous visage appeared. She started on seeing me.

"Here, Marie," I said, "I want to speak to you."

"Certainly, certainly, monsieur;" and she came quickly out, and closed the door behind her.

"Listen," said I. "Something has happened which makes our plan impossible. The young lady must come away at once."

The old woman looked surprised.

"But how?" she asked.

"I can get her away, never fear," I answered. "It is not safe for any of us if she stays."

Mdme. Delbruyck was impressed by my look and tone. She evidently saw that something serious had occurred.

"Which room is she in?"

"In the top front room. I will show monsieur."

"Where is the key?"

"It is in the door. Come, monsieur."

Mdme. Delbruyck's activity was not on a par with her zeal in my service, and still less on a par with my anxiety.

"Never mind. I can find the room."

"You cannot miss it," she said, panting, and glad to escape any more climbing. "It is at the very top—the door facing you."

"Thank you. Wait at the foot of the stairs."

I took the light which she brought out, and hurried upstairs. They were steep, and took sharp turns round massive oaken posts, which threw grim shadows as I carried the light. There were small windows on the chief landings, through which the wind came freely, so that I had to take some care to shelter the flame, for I did not fancy ascending with so important an object, with the chance of being disabled by a fall. Ghostly and cobwebby was the ascent, and dismal and dilapidated the top landing, where I stood at last outside the room which held my treasure.

The key was in the lock.

I knocked gently, and then turned the key.

With a quickly-beating heart I opened the door.

"Mary!"

She stood, as pale as death, with one hand resting on the back of the chair from which she had risen, the other raised in wonder or fear.

I thought she was about to faint.

"Mary, I have come to take you away from here—to friends, to safety."

The colour rushed back to her face, and she gave a cry, a sudden sob and sprang towards me. The strength of simple, unquestioning love could not have been more sweetly or more strikingly shown. Surprise, fear, joy, every other emotion was postponed, and trust—implicit trust—taking the cue of immediate action from my looks, was all that she showed.

For one moment she rested in my arms.

"My darling, come quickly!" I said.

I took up a wrap which lay on the bed, and folded it round her. She put her little hand in mine; I left my lamp on the table, and we began to descend the stairs.

Quietly and slowly we made our way.

When we reached the bottom of the second flight she stopped me, and I could see one white hand held up in the attitude of listening.

"Hark!"

I heard from below the sound of voices in excited talk—the voice of Mdme. Delbruyck, of Georges, of the Basilisk.

I pressed her hand, and we proceeded another stage. Had all been discovered? I was not long in doubt.

"Come," said the Basilisk, in her hardest tones. "If he ever gets out alive, it is all up with you."

Then there was a hoarse laugh, and Georges said:

"Be easy, mademoiselle; they will not get away alive." And steps came up the stairs.

I swung my life-preserver, to get it nicely balanced.

Mary stood by me and held my left hand. I looked in her face. It was a face of fear, but the glorious trust was still beaming from those beautiful eyes. We stood opposite an open window, through which the fresh strong wind was blowing freely. Its breath spoke of life—of liberty. It should not be we who would not leave the place alive. The steps came nearer—a light elastic tread, and the rustle of a woman's robe, followed by the laboured steps of a heavy man. They were bringing a light. It began to flicker and waver about, and throw herald beams of danger close to where we were standing.

"Step lightly," said the Basilisk.

"They won't hear," said the man; "they will be love-making."

We shrank well back behind the projecting oaken post, I resolved to fell Georges without mercy the moment he saw us, and the Basilisk would, I judged, be for the time powerless. I could feel Mary trembling in every limb. The steps of our enemies were close to us.

"Three more flights," said the man. As he spoke the pair were for a moment visible. The Basilisk, with white set face, held in one hand a lamp, in the other a revolver Georges, a big, bullet-headed ruffian, carried a long knife. Two steps more and they must see us. With a roar and a rush a violent gust of wind streamed through the window,

and all was pitchy dark. The Basilisk's lamp was blown out.

Georges growled out an oath. I breathed a little thanksgiving.

"Come on," hissed the Basilisk. "You know the house!"

And slowly and cautiously, yet with a good deal of stumbling and noise, they continued their ascent.

"Now!" I whispered, when they had reached the next landing.

And, hand-in-hand, we recommenced our journey. We went faster than they did, and could already feel the wind from the open door at the foot of the stairs, when an angry roar above showed that our flight was discovered.

"They've gone! Stop them, mother!" roared Georges, and we heard his heavy feet coming down two and three steps at a time.

Then we made a rush for it.

I saw the old hag, with a face full of fury, dart at the door which closed the exit from the stairs. She was not quick enough. Ere it could slam I was against it with all my force, and Mdme. Delbruyck was rolled over, a confused and battered mass of iniquity. Mary jumped the last few steps, or seemed to fly, rather, like a bird into my arms. I swung her into the little courtyard. With the fury of murder in his eyes, Georges was upon us, his long knife

glittering, upraised. Two steps took Mary into the street, as Georges struck madly at me with the knife. Too late by a second or two Full on his bullet-head the loaded stick came down. Over he rolled, coming with superfluous force against the wall, and the long knife shot out of his hand, through the gateway, and went jingling over the cobble-stones right across the street. We hurried away, and in five minutes I had hailed a *fiacre*, and was jolting towards the Hôtel St. Antoine, with Mary Fortescue in a dead faint in my arms.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A DEFIANCE.

I BEGAN to feel alarmed as the lights of the lamps and the shop windows shone upon Mary's white face and closed eyes. But as I was upon the point of ordering the driver to stop at the first chemist's shop, I observed signs of returning life.

Mary opened her eyes. She started from me with energy, casting a look of piteous resolution at me, which spoke eloquently of the persecution and misery she had undergone.

"Mary," I said, "my darling, you are safe now!"

All the misery, and ten thousand times the dangers I had gone through were as nothing compared with the happiness of seeing the change which came over that beautiful and gentle face when I spoke. There is something very piteous in the sight of the weak standing at bay, the defenceless at last befriended by despair. Some desperate resolution of resistance it was, some impulse of escape at any cost, which prompted her to spring from my shielding embrace, and turned the appealing fear of her eyes into a

look of troubled courage. It showed that the limit of endurance had been reached, and that her enemies would no longer have had a passive victim to reckon with. Though if her rescue had been delayed but a little while longer, the instinct of defiance would, in all probability, have been aroused too late.

At the sound of my voice she started, she seized my hands, and looked into my face. Then the revulsion of feeling, from misery to joy, from despair to the certainty of safety, sent such a light into her face that it positively seemed to illuminate the carriage, and to put the bright lights of the shops and of the streets to shame.

There was no time for enquiry or for explanation yet. The time was all too short for the happiness that flooded our whole beings.

"Safe! Safe!" was the burden of the blissful song that was singing in our hearts, and transforming the somewhat dingy *fiacre* into a Cinderella's chariot, which would not lose its magic beauty for the striking of all the clocks in all the steeples of Antwerp.

Soon—all too soon now, we clattered up to the door of the Hôtel St. Antoine. There the first face I saw was Shaw's, and being free from the torturing anxiety of the last few hours, I had time to feel some compunction for the way I had left him. He looked positively ill with anxiety, and the relief and the exultation which he showed

at our safe return warmed my heart towards him more strongly, if possible, than before.

Mary was committed to the care of the landlady, and everything was done to conduce to her security and comfort; but, tired as she was, she would not go to bed before she had joined Shaw and me, and sweetly and thoughtfully thanked our good friend for all that he had done on her and my behalf.

Shaw exercised a little of his professional authority after a while, impressing upon her the necessity of thorough repose after all the dangers and anxieties she had gone through.

I was glad he did so, for I felt that he was right, but I could not bring myself to suggest anything which should shorten the first delightful talk, away from the horrible atmosphere of mystery and crime that overhung Hanover Lodge, free from the fear of Plöwitz, and the equally unscrupulous and more dangerous Basilisk.

When Mary had gone I told Shaw my story more in detail. It had been told already amid the excitement and interruptions of a general comparing of notes.

I learnt now that Harper had been searching for me, full of fears for my safety, and that information had been sent over that the mystery of the explosion at Hanover Lodge had not been cleared up, that no trace of any of the inmates could be found, and that no bodies had yet been discovered.

"And what," said Shaw, "do you suppose the Basilisk will do now?"

"I cannot tell; I cannot think at all yet," I answered. "I don't see what she can do, but I feel sure that if she can do us any harm she will; and she is not an enemy to be despised."

"By no means; but she must keep quiet now for a while. Her intimate relations with Plöwitz, who was apprehended on a charge quite distinct from the attempted abduction of Miss Fortescue, will prejudice her greatly if she brings herself in any way under the notice of the authorities."

"We must take Mary back to England," I said. "We shall hear no more of Mr. Beaufoy now, and circumstances have made us her guardians."

"Yes," said Shaw; the sooner we are back in England the better."

And we talked long and late over our plans, arranging finally that Shaw should make arrangements for Mary to stay for the present with his sister, a widow, who had a large and pleasant house at Richmond, where she generally had charge of two or three Indian children. We must then see what could be done to find out the state of her affairs and await the upshot of the police enquiries into the case of Plöwitz and the disaster at Hanover Lodge.

Then, with a hearty and congratulatory shake of the

hand, and with minds free from care and full of hope, we parted, and I slept as a man should who has gone through great suspense and come out triumphant.

In the morning Mary appeared looking, to my joy and surprise, but little the worse for her troubles and fatigues. Joy, hope, and security had wrought a great change in one night of serene rest. Accompanied by Harper and a subordinate, I set out about eleven o'clock for the scene of last night's adventure, to obtain from old Mdme. Delbruyck all the details we could, with a view to bringing the Basilisk within the grasp of the law. We arrived to find the house deserted and shut up.

"No matter," said Harper; "we shall be able to lay hands on them."

We then proceeded to the house where Plöwitz had first taken Mary, and found there the small travelling-trunk which was all she had been allowed to bring with her.

"Well," said I, on our return, "we had better cross by to-night's boat.

"You can't very well," said Harper, unless you're going to let the whole thing drop."

This I was quite willing to do, though the desire of seeing condign punishment inflicted upon all who had had a share in this fiendish scheme was very strong.

Shaw at first advised strong measures, but Mary was

evidently ill at ease till she should be again on English ground, and this time among friends.

"What does it matter?" I asked. "Plöwitz is accounted for without our interference. The Delbruycks were only instruments in the hands of Miss Beaufoy. She will scarcely be able to harm us again. She can never return to England."

"And Mr. Beaufoy?" said Shaw.

"He has covered the traces of his illegal practices with the ruins of his house. He will not be heard of again. What will his safety be worth now Plöwitz is captured?"

"But it would be well to see him," said Shaw—"to make him give some account of his stewardship of Miss Fortescue's affairs."

"That doesn't matter," said Mary nervously. "I would rather not see him again—ever!"

"But I should," said I. "It is very important that we should see Mr. Beaufoy somehow."

At this moment the door was thrown open, and a waiter announced:

"A gentleman to see mademoiselle!"

And with a disagreeable smile upon his face, faultlessly dressed, and looking the picture of prosperity and influential respectability, Mr. Beaufoy strode into the room. He was accompanied by an official-looking individual, a Belgian. There was a moment of silence on our part from

astonishment. Mary shrunk back between Shaw and me and put her hand in mine.

"I am come," said Mr. Beaufoy, "to fetch my ward. Mary, get ready at once, my dear, to come with me. And you, sir, you will have a very awkward task in justifying your conduct. Perhaps you will have the goodness to give what explanation you can of your proceedings."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

PARRIED.

THE audacity of the man confounded me. We had to a great extent reckoned without our host, and Mr. Beaufoy, for whatever reason, was evidently determined to brazen out his position as Mary's guardian.

The contrast between his firm, erect, business-like bearing, the commanding kindness which he knew so well how to assume, and the extreme terror and repugnance exhibited by the girl whom he claimed, was the most eloquent appeal for protection that helplessness could make. She shrank away from her guardian, a manifestation which in no degree modified his affectation of suavity towards her, though he spoke as usual in a tone of distinct command.

"Come, my dear," he repeated; "you must get ready at once, as we leave Antwerp immediately."

The habit of submission was so strong in her, the helplessness of her position at Hanover Lodge had so entered into her soul, that Mary, with a look of piteous appeal, began to move towards the door.

"Stay!" I said. "I do not allow Miss Fortescue to leave this place except of her own free will and pleasure."

Mr. Beaufoy shut his eyes and smiled seraphically.

"Come, Mary," was all that he said.

I put my arm round her to reassure her.

"And as your business is not with me or Dr. Shaw, perhaps you will be good enough to leave the room."

"I have business both with you and Dr. Shaw," he said, "business which will be extremely unpleasant for both of you. I have been compelled to place the matter in the hands of the police, but the inconvenience which will result from your detention is due to your interference in matters in which you neither have or ever will have any concern."

The official who acompanied Mr. Beaufoy explained with perfect politeness that he must trouble us to accompany him. Mr. Beaufoy, a gentleman whose wealth and position were in themselves a guarantee of his *bona fides*, had charged us with unlawfully taking his ward from her proper guardian. Shaw and I demurred. We offered guarantees, references, sureties—anything to avoid leaving Mary again in the power of her enemies.

The position was most trying. No charge whatever could be substantiated against us; but it was obvious that Beaufoy had laid an information against us in order to take Mary away while we were temporarily unable to help her.

The commissary was evidently unwilling to be harsher with us than he was absolutely obliged to be, but it was equally evident that Mr. Beaufoy had impressed him with an idea of his importance and position, which prejudiced him very strongly in his favour.

Shaw and I held a hasty council of war.

"We ought to see Leverett at once," Shaw suggested.

I proposed to the commissary that we should send for an English solicitor. He seemed inclined to wait our convenience in the matter, but Mr. Beaufoy strongly objected, and held a whispered conference with the official.

"You can see Mr. Leverett at leisure, but you must really come with me at once," he said firmly.

"And meanwhile," said Beaufoy, "I shall remove my niece to more becoming lodgings. To be living in an hotel with no companions but two young men is not the sort of thing which I consider desirable for a young lady, who is in the position of a daughter to me."

The patience of the police official, who could get no encouragement for his polite nature from Mr. Beaufoy, began to wear to an end. The dispute between ourselves and Mr. Beaufoy waxed hot, and the commissary, apparently scandalised by the words I addressed to the ultra-respectable guardian of the young lady, went to the length of summoning aid, and making something of a display of force. To avoid being forcibly conveyed through the streets to the

police-station we were obliged to give a promise to accompany him immediately, and the myrmidons who had mysteriously answered to his summons withdrew.

"Let us send this at once to Leverett?" said Shaw, pencilling a small note, and ringing for a waiter.

"Certainly."

"What can Leverett do for you? Nothing for some days, I imagine," said Mr. Beaufoy, with a faint smile of malice.

"He can do more than you think. He knows already a good deal about your friend Plöwitz."

"My friend Plöwitz!" said he, with an ill-dissembled start of alarm.

I observed that the police-officer gave a sudden and keen glance at him as I mentioned the name.

"Your friend and fellow-worker," I went on. "The man to whom you entrusted your niece—the man from whom we saved her."

"This sort of talk will not improve your position, my friend," he observed sarcastically.

Shaw's note was gone, and there was nothing further to delay our departure, our renewed separation from Mary. Any minute of time we could gain would be valuable.

"Do you know," said I, addressing the police-officer, "that this gentleman, who affects not to know Plöwitz, entrusted this lady to his keeping, to be taken abroad by

him, to be forced into a union with him ? That my friend and I, wishing to save the lady from this persecution and tyranny, followed them, and rescued her ! Plöwitz is well known to the police. If you lose sight of this man, you will lose a prize second only in value to Plöwitz himself."

The commissary looked perturbed and astonished. Mr. Beaufoy did not deign any sort of explanation. His calm tones carried weight with them, and reassured the perplexed official :

" Your knowledge of Belgian criminals supplies you with materials for wild libels. We shall meet again soon in court."

He advanced towards Mary, who, white and terrified, had been keeping out of his way. The commissary at the same time made a peremptory sign for us to accompany him.

" M. le Commissaire," I said very gravely, " I give you fair warning. If you lose sight of that man now, you will very likely never see him again. You will have to let my friend and me go very soon. This charge is a ruse to get us out of the way. Meanwhile Mr. Beaufoy escapes. Watch him, at least, until Plöwitz is examined. You will regret it if you don't."

" Plöwitz again ! " said Mr. Beaufoy impatiently ; " what does all this talk of Plöwitz mean? "

" It means, sir," I said, " that your accomplice, Blitz, or Plöwitz, was arrested yesterday."

Mr. Beaufoy's face turned ashy white. He evidently imagined that Plöwitz had got safe away. Something had gone wrong in the communications of the syndicate, or they were spoiled by the good fortune that had long attended their efforts at baffling the police.

"Now," said I to the commissary, "if you cannot allow us to remain at liberty for the present, you can see, perhaps, that this man may require a little looking after. Lose sight neither of him nor this lady."

Mr. Beaufoy very quickly recovered himself, and addressed the officer.

"You know my address," he said courteously and calmly. "My poor niece must be removed at once from this place, associated with such trying scenes."

The commissary invited us once more to start. The situation was perplexing and undignified. Losing patience, or, more probably, finding a relief from the perplexities of his position in bluster, he summoned once more the waiting myrmidons, and Shaw and I, the most law-abiding of men, found ourselves each between two active little policemen. The moment Beaufoy saw us secured, he took Mary by the hand, and led her towards the door. She followed, stunned by the sudden relapse into the old slavery.

"Keep up your heart, Mary," I said. "You will be well watched."

I felt that the commissary was not likely to overlook my caution, for it could do him no possible harm to observe it, and there might very well be some truth in my charges.

Beaufoy turned a look of venomous rage upon me.

"Silence, sir!" he hissed. "You, at least, are never likely to see her again."

And with a hard laugh he threw the door open, and gazed with malicious enjoyment upon the group.

Then, to my inexpressible joy, the face of Harper was seen at the door, and a number of people with him. In a second, before he could realise what was happening, Mr. Beaufoy was deftly seized and handcuffed, and a silence of surprise and suspense fell on all in the room.

Mr. Beaufoy was the first to break it.

"What," he gasped, livid with rage and fear—"what is the meaning of this?"

"The meaning is, sir," said Harper quite cheerfully, "that you are charged with being an accomplice in Blitz's coining speculations, and with being an accessory to the murder of Hardy."

A consultation between Harper and the Belgian officials now took place, the upshot of which was that Shaw and I were allowed to remain where we were, on our undertaking to be at hand when wanted. Mr. Beaufoy was led away in a state of speechless collapse, and with

Mary still in our safe-keeping, a delicious feeling of security and prospective happiness stole over me once more.

Mary, when not in the presence of any of the Hanover Lodge associations, quickly recovered her spirits, and showed the capacity for happiness which had been so cruelly kept in check heretofore.

We pleased ourselves with plans for the future, and said good-night, full of hope once more.

Then Shaw and I had a quiet talk over it all again.

"All will be well now," he said. "The clouds are drifting away."

"But there is one cloud, dark, and threatening, and dangerous."

"And what is that?" he asked quickly.

"The Basilisk! We have not heard the last of her yet."

CHAPTER XXXV.

NEMESIS.

ANXIOUS as we were to leave these associations of crime and danger, we found it impossible to get away for several days, but at length we had satisfied the requirements of the Belgian police, and were at liberty to depart. No news had been received of the Basilisk since the night of the attempted murder. I felt easier in mind as the days passed by. Plöwitz and Mr. Beaufoy were both safe in custody, and, whether to avoid danger to herself or to evade the necessity of giving evidence, it seemed probable that Miss Beaufoy would not venture to trouble us. These few days of security had been very happy ones, marred only by the necessity of attending to the demands of the authorities for information on various points connected with the arrests. Shaw had meanwhile made arrangements for Mary's reception by his sister at Richmond, and we had taken measures for putting her interests under the care of the Court of Chancery. The evening of our departure had arrived. We were to cross by the night-boat to Harwich. I was sitting alone, thinking things over and making

plans for the future, in the large sitting-room which we had occupied, when a waiter appeared and announced a lady.

I rose with a feeling of apprehension. There stood against the clear twilight sky, against the low old-fashioned window, a tall dark figure, ghost-like and silent. It was she at last—the Basilisk. She advanced towards the light of the fire, and I could see once more the marvellous light of those eyes—witching, cruel, unholy.

She came to me, and I saw that she smiled—a smile neither of malice nor of deprecation. Simply the imperial smile of a proud but gracious woman. The spell was strong still. But I thought of her relentless hate, I saw the gleam of the murderer's knife, and I felt steeled and safeguarded against any wiles or treachery.

I did not speak, but looked at her coldly, questioningly

"You are surprised to see me?" she said.

"I am surprised that you can come to me like this," I answered—"that you can come calmly smiling to one whose blood might have been upon your soul."

"You have not understood me," she said. "I do not tolerate opposition, even from those I love."

"And you would do worse than kill those you love," I said, with anger and scorn. "You would horribly injure the helpless and the innocent to strike at those you love. God save me from love such as yours!"

She turned pale, and bent her head a moment. When she looked at me again the soft light had not returned to her eyes, though she still smiled.

"You have not dealt kindly with me," she said, in a subdued voice.

As she spoke she drew a step nearer to me. With any other woman that step would have been the prelude to an impassioned outburst; the sudden motion of the arms concealed beneath her long cloak would have heralded one of those terrible appeals where pride goes down before despair, and despair is graced with more than all the majesty of pride. With the Basilisk it was not so. The sudden action contradicted the sad softness of the voice, and I looked for the gleam of a concealed dagger, or the flash of a hidden revolver. She checked her impulse, however, whatever it might have been, and went on in her low melodious voice:

"It was an unhappy day for me when I saw you first. It was an unhappy day for you when you saw me first. It was long ago. You loved me then without knowing why. That love—a boy's tempestuous folly—cost you your sight. Then it so fell out that our positions were reversed. Had you remained in darkness you might have been the means of changing all my life. But you saw—too much, and you loved another!"

"Did she not need love more?"

"What has that to do with me? You hate me for pursuing my end in my own way. You should respect me rather. You made your choice. I do not think it was a wise one."

"Why bring up the past again, Miss Beaufoy?" I said. "It is not long past, but it is dead, and well that it is dead. It was a past of misery, of horror, of cruelty, of crime."

"It is over for you, but it is not over for me," she said. "We shall not meet again. But I came to ask a favour of you after all."

I was touched—who could fail to be?—by the humility of this glorious criminal, and I promised to fulfil her request if I could.

"You go away to-night?"

"Yes."

"I should like to see Mary before you go."

I felt a chill of dread as she asked this.

"I do not think that is possible. Mary has gone through so much, the sight of you might have an injurious effect upon her."

I spoke firmly, but as kind as I could.

"Do not be afraid," she said with a little scorn; "it is not quite a selfish desire. I would make some amends to Mary for the past, and there are some things in relation to her property which it would be to her advantage—and to yours," she added gravely—"that she should learn."

"Can you not tell *me*?" I asked.

"And yet you refuse my simple request! Do not be unreasonable. I will tell Mary herself, or no one."

"In my presence?"

"Certainly. It must be in your presence."

It would save a lot of possible trouble if we could get some light voluntarily thrown upon the state of Mary's property, and I reflected that there was really no reason for refusing this last request. I rang, and sent a message asking Mary to come to us.

Miss Beaufoy remained standing, a tall, dark figure, unrelieved even by the whiteness of her hands, for she kept them folded beneath her cloak. The clear twilight had given place to night, and the glow of the fire gave only a partial and baffling light. The influence of the mysterious figure oppressed me, and I lit the candles, disclosing the splendid eyes and the pale perfect face more clearly. We spoke no further word.

Soon the door opened, and like fresh spring air Mary Fortescue brought the atmosphere of innocence and love into the darkling room.

She shrunk rather from her kinswoman, but overcame the instinct and advanced to her, trembling a little, but bravely eyeing her in the strength of her recovered freedom.

"Mary," began Miss Beaufoy, "I have come to make matters more equal between us."

"It doesn't matter," said Mary; "nothing matters now. The past is past, and the future is all bright."

The Basilisk smiled a very threatening smile.

"I have come to make some amends," she said, and then and there she entered into a statement, clear and concise, of some details of Mary's position and property.

The information would be most useful, and I was at a loss to account for her generosity. Perhaps it was unfair to seek a motive. A generous impulse was not foreign to such a nature as hers, especially when she could serve no purpose to her own advantage by keeping the knowledge to herself.

"And now I suppose you mean to marry and live happy ever after?" she said.

"I trust so," I answered; "as soon as I can set my own affairs in order."

A glance of white, furious anger shot from the Basilisk at her cousin, but it passed in a moment.

"And now, my dear Mary," she said, "can I do anything more for you?"

"No, nothing," said Mary, who had got over her terror, and was as cold and haughty as ever Giulia Beaufoy had been.

"Do you not even wish for some revenge?" sneered the Basilisk.

"Revenge! I do not think of it. I wish harm to none of you. All I wish is never to see you again!"

The Basilisk had drawn close to her.

"Very well," she said in a low, choked voice, "very well. You shall have your wish—you shall never see us again."

A quick motion of the hidden hand, the gleam of a snow-white arm! With a cry of horror I rushed forward and seized the upraised hand by the wrist. A splash of liquid fire upon my hand, an awful cry, and Giulia Beaufoy was writhing in agony upon the floor. The vitriol, which she had designed for Mary, had fallen upon herself. Blasted by her own awful device, her beauty was marred in its prime, and, by a swift and terrible judgment, perpetual darkness veiled the once beautiful eyes of the Basilisk.

* * * * * *

Of Plöwitz I heard no more. Mr. Beaufoy's trial caused an immense sensation. His death at Portland shortly after his arrival there passed almost unnoticed, though there were circumstances of cunning and determination about the means he used to compass it, which will probably reward the researches of some future story-teller.

The memory of those terrible days is still too recent to enable Mary to talk much over the past yet, though, in the sunshine of a happy home, she has lost already the shadow of the unhappy years.

* * * * * *

Last August we were staying in a lively little French watering-place, but little frequented by English people. I was smoking a cigar on the sands at sunset, when my ear

was taken by a voice of wonderful power and sweetness. It thrilled me with a strange feeling of familiarity. I joined the large crowd which was listening in rapt attention to the music.

I enquired of a gentleman, whose acquaintance I had made at the *table d'hote*, if he knew anything of the singer.

He informed me that she was a woman who was quite blind—who had lost her sight, it was said, at the hands of a disappointed rival.

"She must have been beautiful too," he added.

"Why does she not get a regular engagement? With a voice like that she surely need not be dependent upon open-air singing like this."

"Ah," he said, shrugging his shoulders, "I do not know. Many managers have tried to get her, but she will not sing even in the casinos in the summer. She is mad, they say. She finds her way about, and is always on the move. Some say she is a female Wandering Jew. Depend upon it she has a history."

We made our way through the crowd by degrees, and found ourselves face to face with the singer—a tall, gaunt woman, with masses of dark hair. Her eyes were bandaged, and her face was terribly scarred.

"Good God!" I exclaimed, horror-stricken. I put a napoleon into her hand and went away. That was the last I saw of the Basilisk.

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